

22 Spanish for business: a journey into employability

Amparo Lallana¹ and Victoria Pastor-González²

1. Introduction

As language lecturers, we believe that we equip our graduates with a range of key skills that give them an edge in the employment market. But, query final year students of a Business and Languages degree on the value of language learning for employability, and they are likely to mention a small number of functional abilities such as CV writing and interview skills. This perception gap inspired us to critically assess how employability is embedded in our language modules. We started by identifying the most sought after skills amongst employers and then explored with the team how these skills are integrated and developed through tasks and assessments. Finally, matching skills and tasks, we visually modelled the process by which students acquire more complex skills as they become increasingly competent in the Target Language (TL).

Keywords: embedding employability skills, language learning, developmental model.

2. What we did

In June 2015, Regent's University London (RUL) organised its first conference on languages and employability. This event triggered a series of questions within the Spanish teaching team. We knew that our graduates, 96% of whom are in full employment or further studies within six months of finishing their BA in

1. Regent's University London, London, United Kingdom; lallanaa@regents.ac.uk

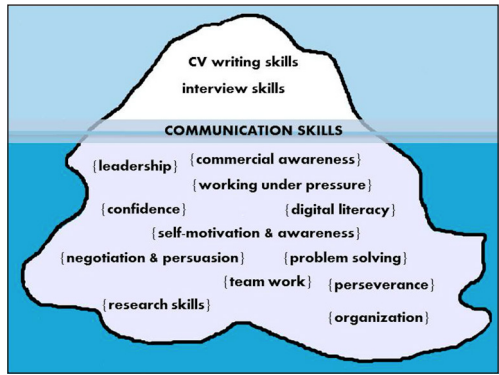
2. Regent's University London, London, United Kingdom; pastorgonv@regents.ac.uk

How to cite this chapter: Lallana, A., & Pastor-González, V. (2016). Spanish for business: a journey into employability. In E. Corradini, K. Borthwick and A. Gallagher-Brett (Eds), *Employability for languages: a handbook* (pp. 155-160). Dublin: Research-publishing.net. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.cbg2016.477>

International Business, are attractive to employers. In addition to business subjects, our students enrol in one or two compulsory languages and complete a study period abroad, proof that the ability to speak other languages, coupled with international experience, gives graduates an extra edge in the current job market. However, following a number of informal conversations with our final year students, it became evident that although we, lecturers, were conscious of the range of employability skills that language learning provides, students lacked that awareness, and they were perhaps ill-equipped to transmit the value of this subject in a professional context.

To represent this perception gap that we believe affects students, lecturers and employers alike, we adopted the iceberg metaphor for culture. We then set out to explore ways in which we could evidence additional opportunities to develop hidden employability skills that learning a language provides in the context of our business degrees.

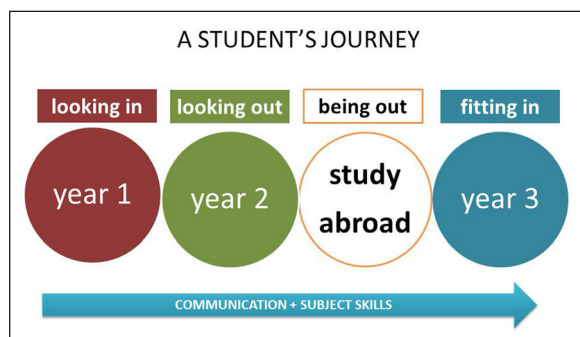
Figure 1. Hidden employability skills



We used [Figure 1](#) as a prompt for a brainstorming session with the team. We all agreed that the more visible functional skills – CV, cover letter, interview skills – are covered, but we then invited the team to identify how the other skills were explored and activated at different points of the curriculum, either as regular tasks or more importantly in the form of assessed work. We concluded that the

development of employability in our language classes can be represented as a journey our learners embark upon, a journey simultaneous to the acquisition of the language. As language proficiency develops, different employability skills are practiced through more sophisticated tasks. Broadly speaking, employability is “making students aware of the world of work” (Daly, 2013, p. 5), and within this journey, students nurture this awareness as they progress through four developmental stages (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. A student’s journey



2.1. Year 1: looking in

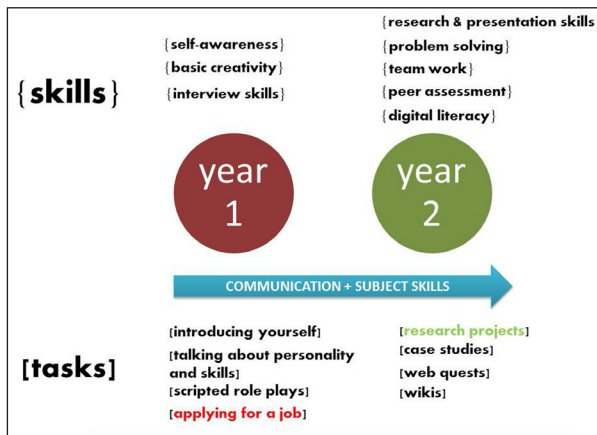
In the first year, communication is basic and language mostly descriptive. Students talk about themselves and engage in a variety of simple tasks, such as applying for a job. In this task they learn vocabulary associated to departments and functions and identify specific skills for a particular department or post. They then reflect on their own skills and experiences to write a basic CV and cover letter to apply for authentic internship opportunities in the TL contexts. Finally, they prepare for the job interview, which constitutes the final oral assessment for these modules.

All along, students are looking in, exploring themselves as employable, and reflecting on what they have to offer to the world of work. Thus, skills such as self-awareness and basic interview skills are activated and practiced (Figure 3).

2.2. Year 2: looking out

Students have by now gained relative proficiency and are able to communicate better and in more complex ways; they can offer opinions, present proposals and make recommendations; and they have the capacity to engage in tasks that look out into the TL cultural contexts and work practices. A key task in these modules is the research project. For this coursework, students research a question related to companies, work practices or the socioeconomic environment of their year abroad destination country(ies) and discuss their findings at different points in the semester through presentations and written exercises. With increasing language abilities, Year 2 students are now looking out, exploring new work environments and developing abilities such as presentation skills and problem-solving (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Matching employability skills and language learning tasks in Years 1 and 2



2.3. Study abroad: being out

With full immersion and operating in the TL, linguistic ability develops significantly: from survival, to operational, to proficient. This compulsory Study

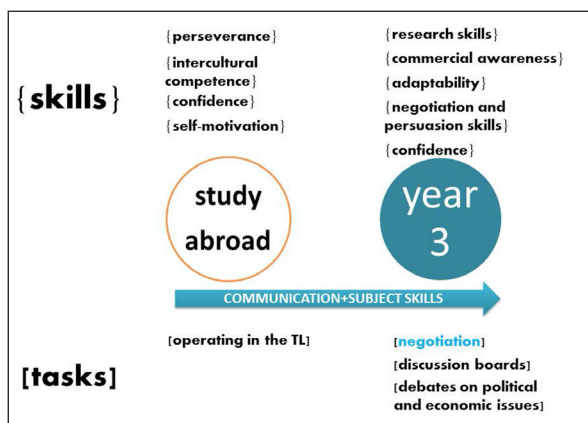
Abroad period also nurtures intercultural competence and awareness. Students have to adapt and react flexibly to new settings, new people, and new ways of doing things. During this rather challenging experience, most gain valuable skills such as resilience and confidence (Figure 4).

2.4. Year 3: fitting in

As illustrated in Figure 4, after the year abroad, language tasks seek to stimulate reflection on personal development and to enhance awareness of the knowledge and skills already gained through language learning and study abroad. Most importantly, students are actively thinking of their future employment, and are keen to demonstrate their fit in the world of work by engaging in more complex tasks that replicate real work environments and situations. One of such tasks is the negotiation where students discuss and agree the terms of a franchise contract.

With this assessment, students polish skills such as confidence and adaptability, but to succeed they must develop advanced skills such as persuasion and commercial awareness.

Figure 4. Matching employability skills and language learning tasks in the Year Abroad and the Final Year



3. Discussion of outcomes and conclusion

At institutions where employability is not a stand-alone element, this type of reflective exercise can be a strategy for language teams to consider how employability is embedded in the curriculum, identify possible gaps and develop a coordinated strategy. Ultimately, the objective is to create a coherent narrative, a story that students understand and are able to sell to future employers. For us, this is the next step; to come up with strategies – workshops, social media, printed material – to raise students’ awareness of their journey into employability.

Reference and link

Daly, S. (2013). Enhancing employability skills through the use of film in the language classroom. *The Language Learning Journal*. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2013.779296>



Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association
Dublin, Ireland; Voillans, France, info@research-publishing.net

© 2016 by Erika Corradini, Kate Borthwick, and Angela Gallagher-Brett (collective work)
© 2016 by Authors (individual work)

Employability for languages: a handbook
Edited by Erika Corradini, Kate Borthwick, and Angela Gallagher-Brett

Rights: All articles in this collection are published under the Attribution-NonCommercial -NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Under this licence, the contents are freely available online as PDF files (<http://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.cb2016.9781908416384>) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.



Disclaimer: Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material: every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net
Cover design and frog picture by © 2016 Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)
Cover illustration by © 2016 Nicolas Fenix (www.nicolasfenix.com)

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-37-7 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-38-4 (Ebook, PDF, colour)
ISBN13: 978-1-908416-39-1 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

Legal deposit, Ireland: The National Library of Ireland, The Library of Trinity College, The Library of the University of Limerick, The Library of Dublin City University, The Library of NUI Cork, The Library of NUI Maynooth, The Library of University College Dublin, The Library of NUI Galway.

Legal deposit, United Kingdom: The British Library.
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: juin 2016.