



Advanced Fluency in Spanish: Becoming Natural

Setting up Home in your New Language

- 1 – Fluency – What Does it Mean?
- 2 – FOUR Language Workouts to Build Linguistic Muscle
- 3 – How to Find Your Own Road

Introduction

This report is a response to feedback from people who read my earlier report, ‘Crossing the Bridge from Learning to USING’. If you haven’t read that report, you can download it for free at www.SaySomethinginSpanish.com/crossing - it’s important that you’ve worked through the ideas it offers before you read this advanced report.

This advanced report is **NOT** for people who are still in the early stages of learning Spanish. If you don’t feel you can communicate in Spanish yet, please download the first report, and put its practical ideas into action – you will very soon see a huge difference. However, if you can already communicate in Spanish, but are frustrated that you are not doing ‘better’ or speaking ‘more naturally’, this is the right place for you.

In fact, in over 35 years of learning (and failing to learn!) different languages, I’ve never seen a report targeted at people who are trying to take those last few steps to real bilingualism – so if you’ve been stuck on a plateau there for a while, I hope very much that this short report will be the last helping hand you need to set up home in your new language...:-)

1 – Fluency – What Does it Mean?

Forgive me if this sounds a little ‘fluffy’, because it is an absolutely vital point. One of the biggest barriers to bilingualism comes in the form of how people feel about the word ‘fluent’. It is ingrained from the earliest stages of learning a language – you want to be ‘fluent’, you want to be able to communicate as well as other people who are ‘fluent’. As you learn more, ‘fluent’ becomes a horizon that is always moving away from you, and you become very skilled at finding new reasons NOT to consider yourself ‘fluent’.

But when you build up psychological resistance to an idea (in this case, ‘fluency’), it becomes measurably more difficult for you to achieve your real targets. You start to spend energy on negative thoughts – energy that should be going into positive language activities. In many cases, people actually build their own plateaus, get stuck at a certain point, because they have convinced their subconscious that they can not go any further.

So, before you can be at home in your new language, we have to commit a crime – and we have to do it together! **We have to KILL the word ‘fluent’.** We have to show that it is a *meaningless* word that doesn’t offer anything to you, so that you can stop thinking about it. In my experience, the best way to do that is to show that you went PAST ‘fluency’ a long time ago.

Let’s look up ‘fluent’ in a dictionary – you’ll probably get something like ‘able to speak or write smoothly, easily or readily.’ So, when you were first able to put together a sentence like ‘Quiero ver lo que usted va a hacer ahora’ and say it at normal speaking speed, you were speaking that sentence fluently!

I’ve known some people who respond to that point by saying ‘*No, fluency means that you can do that with every single sentence all of the time.*’ Is that a sentence you would tend to agree with you? Do you find yourself agreeing with it now? If **THAT** is the right definition of ‘fluency’, then there are virtually NO ‘fluent’ Spanish speakers anywhere in the world! Not even people who grow up speaking Spanish, and only Spanish, say EVERY SINGLE sentence perfectly and fluently. They stop, they pause, they say um and er and put the wrong words in sometimes – just like **YOU** do with English.

So, we need to KILL the word ‘fluent’. We need to jump up and down on it with heavy boots until it is dead! Throw it out – it is a meaningless word, which has no relevancy to you, and offers you no help.

Most language learners I know are quite kind people, though – and they don’t like to murder ‘fluent’ until they can at least have something else to nurture in its place. They’ve been friends with the idea of ‘fluency’ for so long that they can’t just put its legs in concrete and throw it over the side of the boat.

Your first advanced exercise

This is a very important first step. You **HAVE** to get rid of the word ‘fluent’, but you have to put something else in its place. What? That’s easy. **It has to be an honest and precise statement about how your language skills are letting you down.**

That may sound like a simple statement – but it has HUGE importance. Look at the difference between someone who says ‘After all these years, I’m still not fluent’, and someone who says ‘After all these years, I still have problems speaking at normal conversational speed.’ The VITAL difference is that for the second of those speakers, you can immediately see what kind of extra work they need to be doing.

So what makes YOU unhappy about your Spanish? Is it that you can’t understand other people well enough? Is it that you can’t speak quickly enough? Is it that you can speak quickly, but you don’t feel that you are expressing yourself fully?

Write it down. Write down exactly what your Spanish is NOT achieving. Then simply choose one of the advanced approaches below to solve the problem you have identified...:-)

2 – FOUR Language Workouts to Build Linguistic Muscle

Get serious about the radio.

In the previous booklet, I recommended that you have the radio on in the background for at least half an hour a day – but if you feel you're closing in on being able to speak Spanish well, but you struggle to understand other people, you want the radio playing in the background almost all the time. There is no better way to practise your listening skills – I've had some people ask about watching the television instead, but the truth is that television is easier than radio, because you can see all sorts of non-verbal clues. With the radio, you have to follow the words themselves, with no extra clues at all.

Having said that, if you spend several hours a day listening to the radio and you want to relax in front of Spanish language television in the evening, that's fine – it certainly won't do your language skills any damage! But if you have lingering uncertainties about understanding other people speaking Spanish, have a Spanish radio station on for as long as possible every single day.

Choose a Spanish day

This is a more difficult step to take, but if you're not happy with how well you express yourself in Spanish, it's a vital development. What it means is that you choose one day a week as a 'Spanish only' day, and during that day you don't say a WORD of English. Not a single **WORD**. Everything is in Spanish, and as a result your brain will stop looking for excuses to switch back to English.

This is an easy way to take advantage of the core reason that immersion courses are so successful. If you let your brain switch back to English whenever it finds something a little difficult, you will always progress at the slowest possible rate. If you make it clear to your brain that you will be spending long periods of time using only Spanish, you will see a corresponding improvement.

Wherever you live, it should be possible for you to achieve one day a week as your 'Spanish only' day, even if you have to play around a little with your usual social life! It's worth the effort – if you can achieve one 'Spanish only' day every week, it will make a very serious difference. Of course, if you can do TWO Spanish days a week, you will have DOUBLE the effect - and so on...:-)

Switch your internal dialogue

We all have an internal dialogue running in our heads pretty much all the time. In the first course, I recommended that you start trying to 'echo' the things you say out loud in English conversations in Spanish in your head. I said that you should aim at trying to do this at least five times every day, to make sure that you are practising creating your own Spanish sentences.

If you CAN create your own Spanish sentences, but you are still frustrated that it takes too long, what I am about to recommend is the perfect exercise for you. It's a real challenge – but if you succeed, you will be amazed and delighted at the difference it makes to your Spanish.

Make the decision that you will not allow yourself to think in English any more. It won't be for ever – just until you feel genuinely happy with your Spanish. But until then, put a ban on English in your own head. To begin with, it may feel like the most difficult thing you have ever done – if you can't think in Spanish, you're not allowed to think. But once you get past the first few baby steps with this, once you have a collection of sentences that you think fairly often ('I can't believe what an idiot that driver in front of me is!' 'Where on earth did I put the scissors?'), this will help your brain reach a far higher gear for the production of Spanish.

Practise speaking

Spanish has individual letters that make your mouth work in a very slightly different way to English. Even if your pronunciation is close to perfect, you are still using muscles in your mouth in a way that is slightly different to how you have used them for the rest of your life. These tiny differences are a very significant part of why some people find it difficult to speak in a relaxed and normal manner in Spanish.

But the good news is, we're talking about muscles here. The muscles in your mouth, like the muscles anywhere else in your body, can be exercised. How do you exercise the muscles in your mouth for speaking Spanish?

By speaking Spanish!

Set aside half an hour every day to read aloud from Spanish books. Choose books that you find interesting, because that will make it feel more enjoyable – but the important thing is just that you spend half an hour reading aloud. This will naturally and easily strengthen the ways in which your mouth needs to move to make Spanish words, and coupled with the two exercises above, will make an enormously enjoyable difference to your spoken Spanish.

TRANSFORM YOUR ADVANCED Spanish – A SUMMARY

1. Get that radio playing – all day long, if you can.
2. Choose a 'Spanish only' day, and stick to it like glue.
3. Switch off the English in your head – make it Spanish or silence!
4. Read aloud from a Spanish book for at least half an hour a day.

3 – How to Find Your Own Road

You wouldn't have come this far without being able to stick to a plan, so I'm relaxed and confident that if you like the ideas I've offered you above, you'll be able to implement them properly. I always recommend that people use a daily checklist, but by this stage of learning, it's less important. If you know that daily targets help you, though, do go ahead and use one.

One of the things you should have noticed is that none of the points I make above are about *learning* Spanish – they are about *using* the Spanish you already have. If you have reached the stage where this report is relevant to you, you don't need to be 'learning' Spanish any more – you will pick up a gradually wider vocabulary, and new ways of saying things, just by listening to other people. In other words, you've reached the point where you can rely on 'learning' in an organic, natural way – the way children do so well.

Once you've implemented the ideas I've suggested above successfully, you will have an impressive command of Spanish. There's no doubt about that. But you're still left with one important decision – **where are you going with your Spanish?**

Maybe you just want to be able to speak Spanish to your Spanish-speaking friends, or to use it in business, or to chat on the internet – or maybe you want to move to a community where you can spend all your time speaking Spanish only.

Here's the important point – if you've got this far, you and *only you* can make that decision. It is vital that you are at peace with your decision, and celebrate it. If you wanted enough Spanish to talk

to friends or family in Spanish, and you've succeeded in doing that, DON'T complain (even just to yourself) that you don't speak Spanish like someone who lives in a Spanish-speaking community.

If you WANTED to speak Spanish like that, you would need to live in a community like that. If you don't want to, you don't want to. Which is fine! The decision YOU make is the RIGHT decision for you.

Too many people want to travel down one road and arrive magically at the destination a different road leads to. Don't be one of those people – they are never happy with their Spanish, and they are never happy with their lives.

Take responsibility for choosing how much of a part you want Spanish to play in your life. In these two reports, with your own hard work added, you have what you need to achieve whatever level of Spanish you want. But please, once you have chosen the right road for you, CELEBRATE the level of Spanish you achieve...:-)

And if these ideas and practical suggestions help you on your journey, do PLEASE let me know – I really love to hear from people who are delighted by the difference these simple tactics make for them. You can email me at aran@SaySomethinginSpanish.com – and I do my best to answer every response personally...:-)

Good luck, and welcome to your new home in the Spanish language!