



TRAFFIC TROUBLE

*This is one of the amusing illustrations from the new Spanish textbook (Hastings House) prepared by WPA educators for the use of U. S. Army and Navy air officers and others wishing to learn practical use of the language quickly.*

LANGUAGE

## Army and Navy Officers Learn Spanish by Verb Approach

Aim of New Method Is To Teach Officers To Think in Spanish; Instruction Oral, Book Only for Reference

By EMILY C. DAVIS

**W**HAT is it like—this method of teaching Spanish to U. S. Army and Navy air officers that WPA educators have worked out, and our fighting men have approved?

Feeling like a veteran of introductory Spanish courses—having started Spanish four times—I set out to interview the men who wrote the lesson book and the officials who work behind the scenes to keep Spanish lessons running smoothly at 55 air stations throughout the country.

Behind the scenes is nearly literally correct, for the WPA offices in which the Government's Spanish courses are planned and directed is in Washington's old Auditorium, once a theater type of building. Desks and file cases throng the stage, boxes, and dressing rooms. Spanish lessons for officers, it so happens, are evolved in partitioned cubicles somewhere in the mezzanine.

Thousands of our Colonels, Captains, Naval Commanders, and nurses—and recently our non-commissioned officers, too—are being launched into Spanish by

the verb approach, it turns out, and the verb is linked with a noun so that it expresses a thought, right from the start. This method is rather new in America's teaching of languages. A Frenchman named Gouin originated it some years ago, but in the United States it has been used mainly in teaching English to foreigners.

The verb approach is particularly effective with beginners, agree the WPA writers of "Conversational Spanish for the Army Air Forces of the United States," Solomon Lipp and Henry V. Besso. Talking in polite turn-about, and fortunately for the interview in English, they said:

"We feel that a language is learned primarily through the ear. Adults who listen and imitate as a child does are learning the natural way. And it is more natural to learn in sentences.

"We are trying to teach the officers to think in Spanish instead of translating — trying to short-circuit the usual slow mental detours of language study."

To make thinking in Spanish come more naturally, they explain that they chose Spanish words resembling familiar

English wherever there was a choice of synonyms.

To give the aviation officers a talking vocabulary in a short time, the beginners' course uses just 629 ordinary and much used Spanish words, plus 67 technical aviation words. This is reminiscent of the 850 words of Basic English that educators have evolved for simplifying mastery of our own language.

Our Army and Navy fliers are learning to speak Spanish with Latin American pronunciation, rather than Castilian. Every one asks that. This means, chiefly, that in words like hacienda, meaning ranch, the c is pronounced s. In Castilian Spanish as spoken in Europe, it would be pronounced th.

Authors Lipp and Besso turned out their first lesson book in three months, which is something of a record for this type of writing. They did it under tremendous pressure of time, teaching experimental Spanish classes, drafting lesson chapters, taking their copy to advisory committee meetings, revising, improving—and keeping ahead of their students in a close race. Like the goal of teaching French without tears, they seem to have been aiming to give the Army Spanish without swearing, though they did not put it that way. To brighten the chore of home work for officers, the illustrations—which were done by artists in one intense week-end—are amusing cartoons.

The book, Mr. Lipp and Mr. Besso want it understood, is not a reader. It is for reference and study. Teachers in the Government's classes do not have beginners translate and read. The teacher talks—starting right in to talk Spanish verbs and a few words to go with them, and introducing about 12 new words at a lesson.

Since the course is all about adventures of aviators John and Charles who land in a Latin-American country, the teacher helps demonstrate aviation-Spanish terms with a toy airplane, showing with a taking-off swoop how el aeroplano asciende.

The writing team of Lipp and Besso is now working on an advanced course, they say, for officers who wish more advanced Spanish.

The Spanish course is the same at all Army and Navy establishments. They tell about one aviator who has been having fun taking his Spanish lessons in three different places. When it is lesson time he just drops in to school in whatever State he happens to be.

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