

THE LANGUAGE QUALIFYING EXAMS

After completing the coursework at Penn's Graduate School of Education and then passing the comprehensive-preliminary exams towards a Ph.D. in Sociolinguistics, the next step before starting on a thesis was to take exams in two foreign languages.

One of the girls in Josy's study group (Cheri Michaud) warned everyone not to waste time preparing for these. It would be wiser, she insisted, to take your chances, plow your way through, and then get to work on the dissertation as soon as possible. Mark Tanner, the only fellow in the group of six, and previously a missionary in Thailand, chose Thai for one of his two languages, giving the University considerable difficulty in finding someone qualified to test him. Everyone else, though, followed Cheri's advice.

Josy decided to take her exams in French and Spanish.

"You'll sail right through the French," her advisor Dr. Nessa Wolfson predicted. "After all, you're a French teacher. Go ahead and take it and get it over with."

So she followed Nessa's advice and found that this was the only exam she had ever walked out of before the allotted time had expired. However, the prospect of taking the Spanish exam gave her pause. After all, she had just begun to learn Spanish somewhat recently, and she felt she needed considerable preparation. Continuing to put it off, she kept responding to José's persistent queries of, "When are you finally going to take that Spanish exam and get it over with?" with a mumbled, "Soon, sometime soon."

"They let you choose your own book in Spanish to translate from," he reminded her. "They select a section from it and give you an alarm clock and four hours to translate. And you're even allowed a dictionary. What else do you want?"

But Josy, still lacking confidence, kept procrastinating.

Finally one morning as she was driving him to the airport to fly to a meeting in California, she announced, "As soon as I drop you off, I'm going over to the School of Education and make an appointment for the Spanish exam."

"Finally!" he responded. "Hallelujah!"

True to her word, as soon as she dropped him off, she headed for the University. Arriving there about eleven o'clock, she parked the car, and went immediately to the Office of Graduate Education.

"Yes, Josephine, what do you want?" Cathy Stemmler, the secretary asked her.

"I'm here to register for my language exam."

"But you took your French exam already," Cathy replied.

"Yes, but I still have to take my Spanish."

"No, you don't," Cathy answered. "You only need one exam in a foreign language."

"Since when?" Josy wanted to know.

"Since nine o'clock this morning," came the reply.

"The committee just had a meeting," she continued, "and they decided that Ph.D. candidates now only need one language exam!"

Josy stared in disbelief. This was the only time she could ever remember when procrastination paid off!