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## Si usted no habla español, puede quedarse rezagado (If you don't speak Spanish, you might be left behind)


By Craig Hacker for USA TODAY

**In Cimarron, Kan.:** Debra Pendland, left, is taking Spanish classes to help her provide home health care information to clients such as Edwuiques Caro, right, and her twins, Noel and Nidia Caro, 9 months.

### Spanish roots spread in USA

By Deborah Sharp  
USA TODAY

*¿Entiende Ud. español?*

If your answer to, "Do you understand Spanish?" is "no," get ready to be left behind.

With the surge over the past decade in the Hispanic population in the United States, speaking Spanish is becoming more of a necessity than a choice in many parts of the country. From feedlot managers in Nebraska to New York City stockbrokers, Americans are scrambling to learn a language that is now spoken by many of the 35.3 million Hispanics in the United States.

Americans are finding that not knowing Spanish can be a handicap, whether dealing with immigrants or schmoozing at a business lunch in the boss' native tongue. Even pop culture references sail over the heads of the unilingual — from the taco craving Chihuahua's "Yo quiero Taco Bell" to the crazy life, "la vida loca," made famous by singer Ricky Martin.

"There's nothing foreign about Spanish anymore. It's the second language of the United States," says Dr. Sam

Slick, who founded Command Spanish,® Inc. the nation's largest firm specializing in teaching Spanish for the workplace.

Type "studying Spanish" in to any Internet search engine, and thousands upon thousands of options appear.

Spanish dominates all other foreign languages in the USA's public schools. Enrollment has nearly doubled over the past two decades to about 3.3 million high school students. Similar statistics aren't available for adults in thousands of night classes and private Spanish language courses. But school owners say the numbers are soaring, even in the most unexpected areas.

Many have discovered that dim high school memories of conjugating verbs and reciting "¿Dónde está la biblioteca?" ("Where is the library?") mean *nada* (or nothing) in the workplace. So, in Ontario, Ore., Orchard Bank foots the bill for its staffers to study Spanish. In Washington, a teachers union offers lessons to members. And in Fountain Inn, S.C., and Detroit, law enforcement officials are lining up *para hablar español* (to speak Spanish).

"The need is tremendous," says Conce Magaña, a Command Spanish® Certified

Instructor, who teaches workplace Spanish at Garden City Community College in Kansas. Kansas has seen its Hispanic population double in the past decade, to 188,252 in 2000.

#### Necessary phrases

Such courses are not aimed at fluency, which takes the average English-speaking adult about five years to achieve. Instead, they cover basics and workplace pleasantries such as "Please come in. Sit down" (*Pase, por favor. Siéntese.*) Teachers often tailor phrases and commands to specific occupations: For police, "Stop! Drop the weapon!" (*¡Alto! ¡Suelta el arma!*) For medical workers, "Where does it hurt?" (*¿Dónde le duele?*)

Though no one expects fluid conversations to ensue, Magaña says the simple Spanish phrases serve as a starting point for better communication. His students include everyone from bank tellers to firefighters in Finney County, Kan., where the Hispanic population has jumped 110% to nearly 18,000 in the past decade. Hispanics make up 43% of the county population of 40,523. Meatpacking and foodprocessing jobs have lured thousands of Mexican immigrants to the southwestern county.

"I'm learning how to communicate — getting people's names, asking if they have questions on their bills," says Amanda Shumate, 21, a propane company clerk and one of Magaña's Spanish students.

"It's amazing how much more valuable you are as an employee in Garden City if you can speak two languages," she says.

President George W. Bush made bilingual history last weekend when he delivered his first regular radio address in English and Spanish, both with a Texas twang. Democratic leaders countered immediately with plans for their own weekly rebuttals, also *en español*.

#### Hard to ignore

It's increasingly difficult to ignore the spread of Spanish in the United States. Bank ATMs offer instruction in Spanish.

The Yellow Pages in many cities add a Spanish-language insert. And Spanish is working its way into everyday use. Is there an American left who can't order fajitas with spicy jalapeños using the proper Spanish-accented flair? (Say the J like an H: fah-hee-tas, hal-a-pain-yos).

From magazines to music, Spanish-language media have exploded. Radio stations more than doubled in the last decade, to 533. Broadcast TV stations jumped 70%, to 53 according to industry estimates. And those figures don't include cable and satellite or numerous outlets that devote only a portion of radio or TV programming to Spanish. Even Walt Disney World *se unió a esta tendencia* (jumped on the bandwagon) this year, with the launch of a Spanish-language Web site for Hispanics.

For Command Spanish,® Inc. business has boomed. Slick says the firm, based in Petal, Miss., offered its first certification in 1997. Since then, the number of instructors authorized to teach the company's materials has exploded by more than 1,000% to 600 today. In workplaces and classrooms nationwide, about 25,000 students take Command Spanish lessons each year. The materials are used in hundreds of community colleges. Classes are tailored for clients, from the Alabama Criminal Justice Center to the Wisconsin Tissue Corp.

As a former college professor of Spanish, Slick says traditional language training leaves many ill-prepared for workplace needs. "At the end of two years of high school or college Spanish, you can read *Don Quixote*, but you can't help someone open a bank account. You can't arrest someone in Spanish. You can't start a hospital IV."

Even so, parents are increasingly urging their children to study Spanish. Spanish class sign-ups have soared more than 90% since the 1970s. The U.S. Department of Education projects total high school enrollment this year at 13.3 million students, and experts say more than one-quarter of them are studying Spanish.

For more information on Command Spanish,® Inc. please visit their website  
(www.commandspanish.com) or contact them at 601-582-8378.