

# Developing academic register in CLIL: An exploratory study of Spanish L2 students' Latin American Political Economy writing in the UK

Desarrollar el registro académico en el AICLE: Un estudio exploratorio de la escritura de estudiantes de Economía Política Latinoamericana en el Reino Unido

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## Abstract

*This paper analyses student academic writing on a CLIL-module in Contemporary Latin American Political Economy delivered in Spanish on the Modern Languages degree at Nottingham Trent University in the UK. It contributes to the diversification of CLIL research away from its almost exclusive focus on English towards other important world languages. The analysis draws on student posts to a module discussion board used to debate, in Spanish, ideas, texts, issues and themes from the module syllabus. The results challenge the claim that for learners to make the transition to more formal registers requires CLIL teachers to incorporate an explicit focus on the words and structures that produce it. Instead, they emphasise the importance of regular reading, writing and social interaction in the development of students' academic writing proficiency. The incorporation of these elements into the module's pedagogical framework ensures that students enjoy extended exposure to academic language and opportunities to use academic discourse for their own communicative ends.*

**Key Words:** CLIL; academic register; setting; discussion boards.

## Resumen

*En este artículo se analiza la escritura académica de estudiantes de un módulo de AICLE sobre la Economía Política Latinoamericana Contemporánea, el cual se realiza en español dentro del programa de Lenguas Modernas en Nottingham Trent University en el Reino Unido. En este contexto, se contribuye a la diversificación de la investigación del AICLE, lejos de su enfoque casi exclusivo en el inglés a otros idiomas importantes del mundo. El análisis se basa en las intervenciones de estudiantes en un foro utilizado para generar debates, compartir ideas, textos, preguntas, y los temas del programa del módulo en español. Los resultados desafían la idea de que para hacer la transición a registros más formales se requiere que los profesores de AICLE incorporen un enfoque explícito sobre las palabras y estructuras que allí se producen. En cambio, se enfatiza en la importancia de la lectura y la escritura regular y la interacción social en el desarrollo de la habilidad de escritura académica de los estudiantes. La incorporación de estos elementos en el marco pedagógico del módulo asegura que los estudiantes se beneficien de una exposición prolongada al lenguaje académico y genera oportunidades de utilizar el discurso académico para sus propios fines comunicativos.*

**Palabras Claves:** AICLE; registro académico; contexto; paneles de discusión.



## INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking recent changes in European tertiary education is the shift towards foreign language medium instruction. The growing emphasis on course delivery in English, in a number of European countries, is the result of several pressures, not least economic (see discussion in Dickson, 2009). According to Dickson (2009) in the context of globalisation, universities are under pressure from national governments to provide the highly educated workforce equipped with the skills, including foreign language proficiency, necessary to compete in the global knowledge economy. They are also being urged to cut costs and boost income by increasing recruitment of fee-paying English L1 and L2 students from around the world (Fortanet Gómez, 2013).

In the United Kingdom, one of the reasons why higher education, unlike in the rest of Europe, remains decidedly monolingual, is that there are no similar pressures on university departments to offer their undergraduate and postgraduate courses in foreign languages. One exception to this is the use of foreign languages, for the most part European, to deliver cultural/area studies modules on single and joint honours Modern Foreign Languages courses. Although quite common, even here, there are pressures militating against this practice, not least of which, somewhat paradoxically, are the same efficiency constraints under-pinning the growth in foreign language medium instruction in the rest of Europe. In the UK, University Language Departments are often reluctant to restrict enrolment on these modules to specialist language students, instead preferring to open them to students on other degree programmes, such as Comparative Literature and International Relations, by delivering them in English. In the author's personal view, based on twenty years of experience of delivering language and content teaching in Higher Education in the UK, there are also practical and (from his perspective) misplaced pedagogical reasons why these courses might not be offered in the target language by Departments of Languages. For example, some academics lack the language skills required to deliver discipline content in a language other than their own. There is also the belief that target language delivery constitutes an impediment to the acquisition of content knowledge and critical thinking skills.

This article and the CLIL practice it analyses, starts from a wholly different premise. The main pedagogical principle underlying the learning and teaching described is that foreign medium instruction is no obstacle to the development of



subject knowledge and is absolutely crucial if students are to acquire proficiency in the high level academic register that is the hallmark of the best tertiary-level language courses. By studying subject disciplines through the medium of the target language, students acquire content knowledge, higher order thinking skills and both the general and academic language essential to constructing meaning in the field (Mehisto *et al.*, 2008; Coyle *et al.*, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011). The focus on meaning in CLIL is clearly consistent with general learning theories such as constructivism, which emphasise the construction of meaning through social interaction and/or individual reflection.

The purpose of the paper, which is part of a larger longitudinal project into language, content, and higher order thinking skill development in CLIL, is to investigate students' acquisition of academic register in CLIL contexts. To this end, it reports on the Spanish academic register proficiency of final year students taking a content and language integrated module delivered in Spanish by the author entitled "Contemporary Latin American Political Economy", which is offered on the Modern Languages degree (MLAN) at Nottingham Trent University (NTU) in the United Kingdom (UK). In line with other Modern Languages degree courses in the UK, students studying Spanish on a minor, joint or major basis on BA Modern Languages at NTU take language, cultural/area studies and applied linguistics modules in each academic year of study. Whereas language modules tend to be compulsory, cultural/area studies and applied linguistics modules are offered as options taught either in the target language or, as previously mentioned, in English.

The paper provides evidence of students' proficiency in the productive use of complex academic-prose in a teaching and learning context lacking an explicit focus on form. Like Kern (2000), it identifies the key variables in the development of students' academic writing as regular access to authentic academic discourse in the subject area and sustained opportunities to practice writing about syllabus content. It also, like Kern (2000), emphasises the importance of discussion and debate and the role new technologies can play in stimulating this. This framework is proving sufficient to ensure that the academic language (as well as the content, and critical thinking) goals of the module are being achieved.

In eschewing any focus on form, the paper is at odds with a recent current within CLIL research that argues that at least some valuable class time should be devoted to explicit register instruction (see, for example, Schleppergrell, 2005;



Colombi, 2006; Llinares *et al.* 2012). The author sees this pedagogical shift away from subject knowledge and critical thinking towards language structures and discourse conventions as, at best, unnecessary and, at worst, counter-productive given the impact that it is likely to have on discipline/content learning. Consequently, this study is firmly located within the school of thought that sees CLIL as a “language bath” in which learners acquire the foreign language by participating fully in learning activities that focus on relevant subject content.

### CLIL’s defining features

Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) define CLIL as a “dual-focused” educational approach in which non-language subjects such as Maths, History and Science are taught through the medium of a foreign language. Although CLIL shares similarities with other forms of teaching that integrate both a content and language focus, they are not synonymous (Coyle *et al.*, 2010, p. 1). The emphasis placed on academic and scientific disciplines, for example, distinguishes CLIL from the topic-based approach and some forms of content-based instruction (CBI), where, as Wolff (2007) points out, content is taken from, “everyday life or the general context of the target language culture” (pp. 15-16).

One of the key defining features of CLIL is the broad range of practices it encompasses. Dalton-Puffer *et al.* (2010) identify a number of dimensions along which CLIL courses and programmes are differentiated including context, duration, foreign language usage, and organisational focus. Hence, CLIL courses can be found at any level of mainstream education (primary, secondary, tertiary) lasting from as little as a several weeks up to a full academic year. Foreign language usage on the other hand, ranges from a few selected readings in the target language to its exclusive use in all aspects of the course. The organisational forms mentioned by Dalton-Puffer *et al.* (2010) range from language showers to year-long cross-curricular modules.

Since its emergence in the European educational context in the 1990s, CLIL has gained traction elsewhere in the world including in the Far East and Latin America, where this journal is a testament to its growing importance. CLIL’s increasing popularity is due to the contribution it makes to one of the most pressing educational challenges of the Knowledge Age: how to equip the workforce with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the global economy in both an efficient and effective way (Coyle *et al.*, 2010, p. 5). Wolf



(2003) justifies the claim that CLIL is an efficient approach to language and content learning on the basis of the “two birds with one stone” rule whereby, “if the content and language are learnt and taught in integration and not isolation, the time available for the teaching/learning process of a content subject and a foreign language doubles” (p. 38).

A number of studies have established CLIL’s effectiveness in developing foreign language mastery, content knowledge, intercultural awareness, and critical thinking skills (See Dalton-Puffer 2010 for wider discussion). In terms of language acquisition, the large-scale Deutsch Englisch Schülerleistungen International (DESI) study carried out in Germany is of particular importance, revealing higher levels of L2 competence amongst CLIL learners compared to their non-CLIL counterparts (Klieme, 2007). Research into content learning has demonstrated that CLIL courses are at least as effective in teaching subject knowledge as equivalent courses delivered in learners’ L1 (See discussion in Georgiou, 2013). Learners also make advances in terms of general cognition, reflecting the intellectually demanding nature of CLIL. This issue is addressed by Gibbons (2009, p. 2), who sees the attention paid to, “intellectual quality and the development of higher-order thinking” as one of CLIL’s most important features.

According to Coyle *et al.*, (2010) learning takes place in CLIL due to the interaction of four elements: content, communication, cognition, and culture. Consequently, teachers are urged to plan for these in their course design and preparation. This explanation of CLIL’s success is developed by Butler (2005, p. 230), who argues that it is the combination of cognitively demanding content and challenging communicative tasks that promote the acquisition of academic language, content knowledge and higher-order thinking skills in CLIL. Another explanation offered for the effectiveness of the approach is the motivational impact it has on both teachers and students alike. There is evidence, for example, that CLIL teachers spend more time on preparation and demonstrate greater cultural sensitivity than their non-CLIL counterparts (Dirks, 2004; Viebrock, 2007). In the case of students, Richards and Rodgers (2001, pp. 209-211) argue that content-based courses spike curiosity and a desire to learn by offering intellectually challenging learning opportunities that are relevant to their needs and interests.



## Bringing form back in

From a second language learning perspective, CLIL is founded on the belief that languages are learnt most effectively in courses that prioritise the contextualised study of meaning over the decontextualized study of structures and forms. According to Kaspar (2000):

(In CLIL contexts) students are required to integrate information to form and to articulate their own opinions about the subject matter, not to analyse the linguistic structure of the target language. (p. 20)

Although its origins are firmly within the camp that believes that acquisition comes about naturally through exposure to relevant language and opportunities to engage in the social construction of meaning, there are some within the paradigm, such as Lyster (2007), who argue that form-focused instruction is an important aspect of language learning and should be taken into account in CLIL course design.

The attempt to “bring form back in” in CLIL, mirrors a similar initiative in Canadian immersion programmes in the 1980s and 1990s in which Swain (1984, 2001) was the main protagonist. Perceived weaknesses in students’ productive language skills led Swain (1984, 2001) to call for a greater focus on lexical and grammatical forms in immersion settings. According to Dalton-Puffer *et al.* (2010):

Certainly with regard to Canadian Immersion Education, which has been one of the prime conceptual reference points (in the beginning) of European CLIL, we can detect a clear movement away from relying solely on the self-propelled, implicit language learner. (p. 7)

The view that exposure and authentic communication are insufficient, on their own, to support inter-language development is shared by researchers working specifically on the development of academic register proficiency in both Europe and the USA. In Europe, the work of Llinares *et al.* (2012) on Spanish school pupils’ developing use of academic English in CLIL contexts is, arguably, the most comprehensive and empirically grounded study in this area. According to Llinares *et al.* (2012), in order to promote register awareness, teachers should sequence activities from easier speaking to more complex writing tasks, a process described as “macro level register scaffolding” and model the appropriate lexis required in classroom interaction as a prerequisite to students using it in their



own writing (micro-level register scaffolding). In the USA, Schleppergrell (2013) argues that university students that first arrived in the country as immigrants from non-English first language countries require explicit instruction if they are to “expand their linguistic repertoires and learn to be more precise in their linguistic formulations to meet the demands of the academic tasks”. This position is supported by Colombi (2006) who, like Schleppergrell (2013), uses a System Functional Linguistic (SFL) framework to emphasise the extent to which writers and speakers’ lexical and grammatical choices are shaped by the context within which they are made. Colombi (2006) uses this approach to analyse one of the most important features of Spanish academic register, grammatical metaphor (GM) in the academic language produced by Spanish “heritage” students in two subject areas, Geography and History. Based on her results, Colombi (2006, p.18) argues that “the use of SFL as a pedagogical framework will call for the explicit presentation of the linguistic features that realise objectiveness or subjectiveness in the texts”.

### Spanish Academic Language

To paraphrase Cummins (2008, p. 71), Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) refers to the mastery of the target language required to both understand and express conceptual knowledge in academic fields. Such proficiency constitutes one of the main learning outcomes of this module, where, for example, students are expected to be able to construct and sustain complex arguments about the different aspects of Latin American Political Economy addressed.

To assess to what extent this outcome is being achieved by students, requires prior identification of the linguistic features commonly used to construct meaning in the field. In the absence of any specific work detailing the grammatical and lexical features of discourse in this area, this article draws on research into the general linguistic features of academic discourse in both English and Spanish. This is supplemented by register analysis of one of the set texts used on the module, Bell Lara & Lopez’s (2005) *La Cosecha del Neoliberalismo en America Latina* (The Neoliberal Harvest in Latin America). As well as serving as a guide to the register features of texts in the field of Latin American Political Economy, it provides a useful benchmark for the subsequent comparison of student prose.



Halliday (1985) identifies GM, whereby one grammatical structure is substituted for another, as one of the key linguistic resources available to academic writers. According to Colombi (2006), and Ignatieva (2008), GM is an important indicator of academic and professional literacy given the role it plays in condensing information, expressing abstraction, highlighting technicality, introducing elements of vagueness and allowing writers to present their views as objective.

The most common form of GM in Spanish, accounting for up to 70% of all GMs found in Spanish academic texts, is nominalisation, where processes usually expressed through verbs are turned into objects and expressed by nouns (Colombi, 2006). According to Ignatieva (2008), nominalisation in Spanish takes the form of a head noun plus a modifier with the modifier often introduced by a preposition such as *de*. This can be seen in the example *el aumento del machismo* (“the increase in machismo”), where a process usually expressed through a verb *aumentar* (to increase), is metaphorically transformed into a fixed object through the use of a noun *aumento* (increase). By steering the focus of discourse away from actors and onto concepts (machismo), nominalisation makes writing more concise and abstract and thus is a key ingredient of academic discourse.

Although extremely important, GM is not the only indicator of Spanish academic register. In their work, Biber, Davies, Jones and Tracy-Ventura (2006) argue that Spanish academic register shares many similarities with its English equivalent. Both languages, they argue, are characterised by the frequent use of nouns, modifying adjectives and prepositional phrases. This is contrasted with the relatively infrequent use of verb phrases and personal pronouns. Consequently, academic prose in both English and Spanish tends to contain long, lexically-dense sentences, few finite verbs, but many nouns especially technical terms. The high level of lexical density in academic texts—according to Biber (2006), between 50 and 60% in the case of English texts—is associated with the “dense nominal packaging of information” (p. 17) that occurs with the careful construction of meaning by authors during the writing process.

As expected, specialist technical vocabulary is especially prevalent in academic texts. In his study Nation (2001, p. 12), estimates that specialist technical terms account for approximately 5% of the running words of academic texts. Chung and Nation (2004) later revised Nation’s (2001) 5% estimate after carrying out vocabulary analysis on texts in the fields of Anatomy and



Linguistics. These revealed much higher counts, particularly in the area of Anatomy, where 31.2% of the running words were classified as specialist. In Linguistics the figure was 20.6% (Chung and Nation, 2004, p. 262). Although there is no equivalent study in Spanish, Chung and Nation's (2004) work does at least provide a benchmark for comparison.

When comparing the lexical and grammatical features of academic texts with those of other Spanish text types. Biber *et al.* (2006) identify *cual* relative clauses and other *cual* clauses as being almost exclusively confined to the written academic register. According to Biber *et al.* (2006): "These features are common only in formal written prose, and especially in academic prose. We tentatively interpret this dimension as reflecting a formal "high" academic style of discourse." (p. 26). A major difference between academic prose in English and Spanish concerns the use of the passive voice. Although present in Spanish, its use is less prevalent than in its English equivalent. To compensate, Spanish academic writers employ impersonal statements such as *es posible que* (it is possible that) or *es probable que* (it is probable that) to avoid appearing themselves as the source of knowledge in their texts. Another resource commonly used in Spanish by academic writers to draw attention away from the agent and onto the action is the passive *se* (Biber *et al.*, 2006, p. 13).

To provide an indication of the lexical and grammatical features of authentic texts in the area of Latin American Political Economy, an extract of one of the module texts: Bell Lara and Lopez's (2005) article, *La Cosecha del Neoliberalismo en America Latina* (The Neoliberal Harvest in Latin America) was analysed according to the dimensions outlined in the discussion above. Textanalyser, a free online text analysis tool, was used to assess the main lexical features of the extract including number of words, lexical density, and sentence length. Textanalyser also codes for aspects such as readability and average syllables per word, hence their inclusion here. The results revealed that the 425-word text had a lexical density of 58% and readability score of 23.7%. In terms of word and sentence length, the averages were 2.23 syllables and 39.58 respectively. The computer analysis was supplemented by manual coding of a number of lexico-grammatical features including the presence of discipline-related technical terms, first person references, tense distribution, and the authors' use of the passive, impersonal statements, the passive *se*, *cual* clauses, and nominalisation. Rating to identify specialist vocabulary was carried out by



the module lecturer, a discipline specialist. He used a combination of his specialist subject knowledge and online Spanish dictionaries to locate Spanish political economy vocabulary in the text. This method for coding specialist vocabulary is one of several discussed by Chung & Nation (2004).

The linguistic means through which Bell Lara & López (2005) convey subject-specific meaning are largely consistent with the assumptions about the lexico-grammatical features of Spanish academic register set out above. Sixty-seven percent of the 37 verbs in the text extract are in the present tense, whilst the remainder are distributed miscellaneous amongst the subjunctive mood and the perfect, preterite, and future tenses. In terms of subject, somewhat surprisingly, there are 3 examples of first-person plural verb conjugations and possessive adjectives, for example, *presentaremos* (we will present) and *no es nuestra intención* (it is not our intention). The authors use the passive *se* to eliminate agency and impersonalise actions on four occasions in the extract; for example, *se impuso el llamado Consenso de Washington* (the so called Washington Consensus was imposed). The extract includes one use of *cual*, thereby confirming the claim of Biber *et al.* (2006) about its presence in academic texts: *al cual consideran el causante y garante último de cualquier tipo de interferencia* (“which they consider to be the cause and ultimate guarantor of all types of interference”).

Nominalisation is a common feature of Bell Lara and López’s (2005) writing. There are 7 examples of nominalisation in the text including: *la eliminación de las interferencias que limitan el supuesto libre juego del mercado* (“the elimination of the interferences that limit the supposed free play of the market”) and *la aplicación práctica de las políticas neoliberales* (“the practical application of neoliberal policies”). Finally, 14.46% of the lexical items are discipline-related technical terms. This is somewhat below the figures identified by Chung and Nation (2004) in their study of the use of specialist vocabulary use in Anatomy and Linguistics, but still higher than Nation’s (2001) original estimate of approximately 5%. Finally, there are no examples in the extract of any use of referencing to acknowledge information sources. That said, this important genre-related feature of academic texts is present elsewhere in Bell Lara y López’s (2005) article.



## Situational Characteristics

To assist the analysis of the roles linguistic choices play in texts, Biber and Conrad (2009) urge researchers to analyse the situational aspects of the communicative contexts within which they arise. They provide a number of parameters to consider when analysing the setting within which communication takes place including: the participants, relations among participants, the mode of communication, and the purpose of the communication.

The participants in this study are final year under-graduate students taking a Spanish Studies optional module: Latin American Political Economy, which is available to final year students studying on the four-year MLAN course. All of the students are language majors combining their Spanish studies with either another European language, Chinese, or a non-language Humanities subject such as English, History, Philosophy, or International Relations. The module cohort is comprised of three elements: one group, from which the subjects for the study are drawn, consisting of students with three years of prior Spanish study including a minimum of one semester spent in Spain on international exchange. This period is crucial in enabling these students to bridge the language gap to the second group, which is comprised of students beginning the MLAN degree course with, on average, 5 years of prior Spanish studies. These students also complete two years of undergraduate study and a minimum of one semester spent on international exchange in Spain prior to taking the Latin American Political Economy module. The cohort also includes a third more heterogeneous group consisting of students from a diverse range of backgrounds including incoming international exchange students from countries such as Hungary and Italy and “mature students”. (Whilst students normally enter university in UK at 18, mature students are those who begin their undergraduate studies aged 21 and over.).

As befits CLIL, the module encompasses both language and content learning outcomes. The three main language-focused outcomes are: the ability to use Spanish language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) with a high-level of fluency and accuracy for academic purposes; the ability to comprehend, analyse, synthesise and evaluate audio-visual, written and electronic texts in Spanish and English and the ability to construct and sustain complex arguments orally and in writing in Spanish. In terms of content, students are expected to demonstrate: high-level knowledge and understanding



of contemporary Latin American social, economic, and political realities; engage in the critical analysis and evaluation of economic and political change in Latin America since the 1970s and reflect critically on historical, theoretical, and societal debates relevant to contemporary Latin America.

The delivery of the module is consistent with the 4Cs (content, communication, cognition, culture) framework developed by Coyle (1999). Cognitively demanding content drawn from Bray's (2004) "New Latin Americanist Pedagogy" is at the heart of the students' learning experience. By focusing on issues such as structural adjustment and its economic and social impact across the region, the course is consistent with Bray's plea to focus on the "new world order" and the role played by international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in its formation. Bray's recommendation that courses on Latin America shift their focus from power elites to citizens is achieved by analysing popular resistance to the social impact of neoliberal globalisation in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Mexico. The course also looks at the political transformation that has taken place across the region characterised by the loss of legitimacy of traditional political parties and the rise of new movements and parties capable of mobilising widespread support around programmes for radical economic, social, and political change.

The content is delivered through a range of formats including lectures, seminars, group discussions, and e-learning. The lecture programme is supported by online interactive learning activities based on written, audio, and audio-visual input made available through NTU's virtual learning environment (VLE). Students enjoy opportunities to communicate their developing ideas about Latin America, in Spanish, both inside and outside the classroom.

In order to promote written communication outside the classroom, the module integrates a discussion board. This is used for weekly online debates in Spanish based on authentic readings from a range of relevant sources including Latin American academic journals, newspapers, books by influential commentators from Latin America, Europe, and the United States, and audio and audio-visual documents made available online by media networks such as the BBC and TELESUR. These provide culturally rich perspectives and insights into the processes of economic, political, and social change addressed in the module



and offer students opportunities to gain deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between their own culture and those found in Latin America.

Students' contributions to the discussion board, which are personally attributed, are addressed to their peers and the moderating lecturer, whose role it is to set up the forum, create topics and questions for debate, establish the rules of the game, intervene in disputes, provide feedback and assess student performance. Ultimately, the challenge for students is to produce authoritative responses, in Spanish, to the questions set by the lecturer on the issues of contemporary Latin American Political Economy addressed in the module. These focus on a diverse range of issues including ethnic conflict, the economic and social impact of neoliberal restructuring and the rise of the Left in countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

According to Coyle (2010; 54), for CLIL to be effective, "it must challenge learners to create new knowledge and develop new skills through reflection and engagement in higher order as well as lower order thinking". The discussion board makes a significant contribution to achieving this on the module. Communication within it has a number of purposes including: summarising existing research, providing information and analysis, interpreting events, developing an independent position, and persuading others. It is important that students develop their own stance in relation to the diverse issues addressed and provide appropriate supporting evidence from lectures, recommended readings, other contributions, or wider research. Previous research (Hughes, 2009) has shown that the best posts synthesise evidence from a range of sources to provide authoritative responses to questions posed on the board.

In the forum, participants can communicate asynchronously with the whole group or on a one-to-one basis. This feature, which is inherent in the medium, is inscribed in the "discussion board rules" set by the lecturer. Thus, students are informed at the beginning of the module that one of the criteria they will be marked against is how well they interact with other class members during the debates:

You should read as many of the postings to a discussion as possible and your own comments should show an awareness of what has been said by other members of the class. Try to go beyond the simple, *estoy de acuerdo* (I agree) or *no estoy de acuerdo* (I do not agree) by adding additional insight and examples or your own perspective. When disagreement occurs, it is important to explain the basis for your point of view as respectfully as possible.



As a result of the asynchronous production circumstances of their posts, students have time to marshal both sources of information and their linguistic resources when formulating their contributions to the debates. As the marking criteria outlined above suggest, there is considerable onus on forum members to read other contributors' posts and to evidence this in their own work through, at the very minimum, an expression of agreement or thanks. Within the discussion context, although participants are nominally equal, it is not uncommon for peer tutors to emerge. Such students enjoy enhanced social status due to the consistent quality of their contributions to the debates.

As long as they have access to a computer and the Internet, contributors experience no situation constraints. This means that they are free to post either on or off campus, day or night, throughout the duration of the module. Unlike in some discussion forums used in academic contexts, the topics are not time limited in this module. This gives participants the opportunity to edit contributions after their initial posting following lecturer feedback and/or new information acquired in lectures, through independent research or from other students' contributions. Finally, it is important to point out that the discussion board has an assessment function. In most cases, this acts as an important motivator galvanising students into action and guaranteeing engagement with the task. In Contemporary Latin American Political Economy, postings to the discussion board constitute 25% of the overall module grade. In his study, Rovai (2004, p.86) reported that the number of posts, sense of community and student satisfaction were all higher when discussion board participation was graded. In an attempt to guide students' behaviour, they are provided with a set of marking criteria and "rules of the game", which include instructions on how and where to post, posting frequency, recommended length and appropriate behaviour within the discussion board (for example, "no flaming" and "all points of view are valid"). In addition to the criteria outlined above, students are assessed on the basis of the number and timing of their contributions, the quality of their target language and, most importantly, their ability to contribute insight to the discussions. In particular, they are rewarded for adding clarity and insight to debates and giving careful and thoughtful consideration to the topics and supporting their arguments with relevant evidence and examples.



## METHODOLOGY

The empirical element of this study is based on a sample of student contributions to a discussion board debate relating to Bell Lara and López's (2005) text *La Cosecha del Neoliberalismo en América Latina* in which they were asked: *¿Estás de acuerdo con Bell Lara y López o piensas como otros que hay alternativa al modelo neoliberal en América Latina?* ("Do you agree with Bell Lara and López or do you think, like others, that there are alternatives to the neoliberal model in Latin America?"). Posed at the midpoint in the module, this question is highly representative of the debates that take place on the discussion board.

The sample is comprised of responses to this question produced by 5 of the 20 students enrolled on the module. The register analysis is limited to this group as its members have had no prior exposure to authentic content in the discipline nor received explicit academic register-focused instruction in previous study. Whereas the other members of the cohort had studied Spanish for several years prior to starting their university degree course, and had previously taken modules addressing Latin American issues and themes during their undergraduate studies, the subjects of this research, who began their degree as *ab-initio* Spanish learners, have had no previous opportunities to take specialist Latin American Studies modules. As one of the students, Stacey, stated:

I just wanted to say that I really enjoyed the module, as an *ab-initio* Spanish student it really was the first opportunity I've had to get into an interesting topic in more depth.

Whereas the rest of the cohort had experienced exposure to academic language in peer reviewed texts and opportunities to engage in high-level discourse in similar thematic contexts during previous years of undergraduate study, this was not the case for the 5 subjects. In their case, this was their first content-based module delivered and assessed exclusively in Spanish, and the first time in their undergraduate careers that they had been required to read authentic peer-reviewed journal articles as set texts or articulate their own ideas about contemporary Latin American themes. This was confirmed by another student, Joe, who stated:

In terms of texts and reading such as Quijano and Bell Lara y López, it was the first time I had really looked at this type of text written in Spanish and regarding Latin America specifically.



## RESULTS

The students' posts in response to the question about the extract taken from Bell Lara and López's (2005) *La Cosecha del Neoliberalismo en América Latina* were analysed for the following lexical and grammatical features: number of words, lexical density, sentence length, readability, average syllables per word, the presence of discipline-related technical terms, first-person references, tense distribution, the presence of the passive, impersonal statements, the passive *se, cual* clauses, and nominalisation.

According to Textanalyser, the average length of the students' texts was 421 words. Whilst the average lexical density of their posts at 52.58% was lower than the 58% registered by Bell Lara and López (2005), it was comfortably within the 50-60% range identified by Biber (2006) as being typical of academic texts.

In terms of word and sentence length, the students registered averages of 2.12 syllables per word and 23.57 per sentence. The difference between the students' sentence length results and those of Bell Lara and López (2005) accounts for the latter's higher readability score: 23.7 compared to an average of 15.16 for the students. Although below Bell Lara and Lopez's (2005) score, the students' results are consistent with the readability scores one might expect to see in English academic texts, which is estimated at 15 or above (no indication is available for Spanish academic texts).

Arguably, the most intriguing result comes in relation to the use of discipline-related technical terms, where, on average, there was a higher incidence of these in the student writing than in the Bell Lara and López (2005) extract. In the students' posts, an average of 14.58% of their words were coded as discipline-related technical terms, compared to 14.46% for Bell Lara and López (2005). The technical items employed by students in their posts, which are redolent of the lexis used in their set readings, were used to articulate ideas about a number of issues addressed in the Latin American Political Economy course, including: the role played by the International Monetary Fund in shaping the region's destiny during the Debt Crisis in the 1980s; policy choices under the neoliberal rubric; the social and economic impact of neoliberalism across the region; the shift to the left and the emergence of regional alternatives to US-inspired free-trade agreements such as the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America).



The students' use of the first person, their verb tense profile, and use of the passive is consistent with both the findings of Biber *et al.* (2006) *vis-à-vis* Spanish academic texts and the extract from Bell Lara and López (2005). The use of first-person verb conjugations and possessive adjectives ranged from 1 (Appendix A) to 6 (Appendix B) in the students' posts. This produced an overall average of 3.6 compared to 3 in Bell Lara and Lopez's (2005) case. The first person was used in the students' work to express, above all, personal opinions, such as in the following examples (see Appendix C and D): *En mi opinión, después de décadas de la lucha, los pueblos de América Latina finalmente eliminaron el gobierno militar* ("In my opinion, after decades of struggle, the peoples of Latin America finally eliminated military government"), and *En mi opinión hay alternativas el [sic] modelo neoliberal en América Latina* ("In my opinion, there are alternatives to the neoliberal model in Latin America"). It was also used by students to address their peers, as in the following examples, where it was used by one student to express agreement (Appendix C): *Sin embargo, estoy de acuerdo contigo que en América Latina existe la pobreza y el desempleo* ("However, I agree with you that there is poverty and unemployment in Latin America"); or as in this example (Appendix B) where it was used to express agreement with Bell Lara and López (2005): *Estoy de acuerdo con Bell Lara y López cuando dicen que cosas al fuera de América del Sud juegan un papel importante* ("I agree with Bell Lara and López when they say that things outside South America play an important role"). Although not a common feature of academic texts, such first person usage is consistent with the discussion board rule that required students to give evidence of having read and considered their peers' contributions.

The present tense was the most prominent verb tense employed by students on the discussion board. In order to emphasise the on-going relevance of their ideas, a minimum of 62.5% (Appendix A) and a maximum of 81.6% (Appendix B) of the verbs used in individual posts were in the present tense. Students also demonstrated their ability to use other Spanish verb tenses effectively, including the preterite, the perfect, the pluperfect, the future, the conditional, and the subjunctive mood. A number of strategies were used by the students to remove the actor and convey a sense of academic detachment, including use of the passive, the passive *se*, and impersonal expressions such as *es probable* ("it is probable"). As in the case of Bell Lara and López (2005), the most common strategy employed by students to avoid expressing ideas as their own



beliefs was to employ the passive *se* form. In total, 6 of the 11 eleven examples found in the students' texts used the *se* form. For example (Appendix A), *se rumorea que los EEUU habían exigido a la oposición que dismantelara el ALBA y suspendiera cooperación con Cuba en el caso de que ganara las elecciones* ("It's rumoured that the USA demanded that the opposition dismantle ALBA and suspend cooperation with Cuba if it were to win the elections"); or (Appendix E): *Se puede considerar como una alternativa al neoliberalismo, ya que se centra alrededor de la unidad anti-imperialista y anti-capitalista, y alienta la promoción de alternativas de políticas económicas y sociales* ("It can be considered an alternative to neoliberalism given that it focuses on anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist unity and promotes alternative economic and social policies"). In another example, a student used an impersonal expression (Appendix C): *no es probable que el gobierno de izquierda se libre por completo de los organismos financieros internacionales* ("it's not likely that the leftist government will be completely free from the international financial organisations").

There is also evidence from the discussion board of students' ability to use grammatical metaphor to help construct their posts. On average, nominalisation was used to discuss abstract ideas on 4.8 occasions by students. In the case of the most prolific user of GM, 10 examples of nominalisation were present in their 514 word post (Appendix C). In one example, *participación democrática en la gestión y supervisión del gobierno* ("democratic participation in the administration and supervision of the government"), the student nominalised the verb *participar* by turning it into the abstract noun *participación*. Use of this strategy allowed the student to add complexity through the addition of a post-modifying adjective *democrática*, a prepositional phrase *en la*, and additional nominalisation: *la gestión y supervisión del gobierno*. GM was also used to express technicality and abstraction. In another example, *una fuerte dependencia del capital extranjero* ("a strong dependence on foreign capital"), the student used nominalisation to articulate the dependent relation that is said to exist between Latin America and international capital, and a pre-modifying adjective was used to emphasise the extent of this dependency.

Finally, in all of the posts, students employed referencing. This fulfilled two functions in their posts: to identify sources, and to recommend alternative texts and other resources to their peers.



## DISCUSSION

By focusing on academic register, this article contributes to the growing body of research in content-based instruction in both Europe and the USA that examines what Llinares *et al.* (2012, p. 19) describe as “the language required to represent the meanings which are crucial to the academic subject and that which is used in organising and orienting the social world of the classroom”. To assess to what extent the module was successful in achieving its objective of developing students’ ability to produce target language prose using a register appropriate to the academic discipline (in this case, Political Economy), an academic register analysis was carried out on student contributions to discussion board debates on syllabus-related issues during the 2012/2103 iteration of the module.

The methodology used to analyse the students’ register choices was taken from Biber and Conrad (2009). Use of this framework ensured that a broader range of lexical and grammatical academic prose features is evaluated than in the case of the studies cited that use an SFA framework. Whereas these tend to focus exclusively on grammatical metaphor, this article has assessed additional features including lexical density, sentence length, readability, average syllables per word, the presence of discipline-related technical terms, first person references, tense distribution and the presence of the passive, impersonal statements, the passive *se* and *cual* clauses. The emphasis on setting in Biber and Conrad (2009) leads to an extensive discussion of the learning context within which the student writing takes place. Features of this setting such as the aims and objectives of the module, the syllabus content, the modes and criteria of assessment, and the learning and teaching methods employed are having a positive impact on student motivation and are stimulating high levels of student performance characterised by in-depth knowledge and understanding of contemporary Latin America, a high level of Spanish general and academic language proficiency and critical thinking skills.

It is clear from the evidence presented that students are functionally proficient users of an appropriate academic register. That does not mean they are exempt from the types of morphological and syntactical errors that are common amongst L2 Spanish speakers, but it does mean that they can communicate information in a discipline-specific way on a range of issues and themes relevant to an understanding of contemporary Latin American Political Economy. The general character of their work is specialised and distinctive and is suited to the ideational purposes of authentic texts in the discipline. By using appropriate



grammatical structures and lexical items, students are achieving a number of functional purposes such as providing information on contemporary Latin American Political Economy, explaining complex subject-related themes and concepts, analysing a wide range of complex political and economic issues and supporting a position by synthesising evidence from a range of sources. Although it is impossible to be completely categorical about this (hence the designation of this study as exploratory), given their lack of prior exposure to the specialist language and content addressed, the evidence presented suggests that there is more than a strong likelihood that this ability was developed through their studies on this module.

If this is the case, what then are the factors leading to success? In the case of Contemporary Latin American Political Economy, language is learned through demanding activities that require students to draw on existing lexical and grammatical knowledge and develop new linguistic resources. This is achieved through both frequent exposure to authentic academic texts and opportunities to practice academic writing and engage in debates about the syllabus issues and themes through the discussion board. The asynchronous quality of the discussion forum means that students have time to plan, revise, and edit their texts leading to higher levels of abstraction and complexity than achieved in more synchronous forms of communication. The social quality of the forum means that students receive help and guidance from both the lead academic and peers as they reflect on, analyse, formulate, and refine their ideas about the issues discussed. The paper, therefore, corroborates the work of other researchers that have pointed to the effectiveness of integrating frequent writing activities into courses and modules delivered on a CLIL basis such as Jackson (2012), who states, “processing information and constructing new texts based on prior reading helps students develop overall target language competence—in particular, it builds up reading and writing skills, as well as discourse skills and helps students expand their vocabulary” p. 176.

Textual exposure plays an important role in students’ developing ability to produce appropriate register. As Järvinen (2009) points out: “texts are instances of a specific register and as such encode the meaning potential of a domain in ways that are typical of the particular register” (p. 73). In this module, exposure has come through reading the set texts, attendance at lectures and additional independent research and has led to the acquisition of lexical items and



grammatical features typical of the register. The two clearest examples of this are student use of discipline-related technical vocabulary and GM. In both cases, the students taking part in the study had no prior exposure to or explicit instruction in either of these important features of academic writing in Latin American Political Economy prior to enrolling in the module.

By pinpointing these factors, the article challenges those studies that argue that to compensate for perceived weaknesses in students' oral and written production, teachers should dedicate part of their precious in-class time to an explicit focus on the lexical items and grammatical forms redolent of academic prose in the target language. At least in the tertiary context, CLIL practitioners would be better advised to consider how best to integrate both exposure to authentic target language texts in the relevant discipline and opportunities for regular written communication into their teaching. They might also wish to consider the ways in which technology can be used to support this, especially outside the classroom. As has been shown in this article, online discussion boards can be particularly effective for promoting the personal and social exploration of meaning in texts that is so important to both language and content learning.

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## APPENDIX A: STACEY (4/01/2013)

El modelo neoliberal fue recomendado para América Latina por el FMI durante los últimos décadas del siglo veinte como manera de facilitar el pago de la deuda externa enorme. Desafortunadamente, la reducción en gasto social y la non-intervención del estado en el mercado, típico de neoliberalismo, han tenido consecuencias negativas para mucha gente en la región, más específicamente para los pobres. Frente a esas dificultades, dos de los líderes muy polémicos en la región propusieron una alternativa factible – el ALBA o la Alianza Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra América.

Hugo Chávez y Fidel Castro fundaron el ALBA en 2004 para contraponer el ALCA – el Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas, y al mismo tiempo desafiar a los EEUU. Hoy en día tiene ocho estados miembros y según la página web del pdvsa (1), su objetivo es:

la transformación de las sociedades latinoamericanas, haciéndolas más justas, cultas, participativas y solidarias y por tanto está concebida como un proceso integral destinado a asegurar la eliminación de las desigualdades sociales y fomentar la calidad de vida y una participación efectiva de los pueblos en la conformación de su propio destino.

El ALBA cree en la intervención del estado en el mercado y quiere hacer América Latina en una región independiente de la influencia del FMI y de los EEUU. Un método interesante empleado por Chávez y los líderes de Cuba y Bolivia para



lograr eso es el truco. Ejemplos son el cambio de de médicos cubanos por petróleo venezolano y el acuerdo entre Venezuela y Bolivia para cambiar diesel venezolano por productos agrícolas bolivianos. Otra iniciativa de Chávez para intentar reducir la influencia de los EEUU es la emisión del canal de televisión “Telesur”, que desafía a la dominancia de los canales norteamericanos en la región - FOX y CNN.

La única alternativa al neoliberalismo que está suficientemente bien organizada para tener éxito se ve constantemente amenazada. **Antes de las últimas elecciones en Venezuela se rumoreaba que los EEUU habían exigido a la oposición que dismantelara el ALBA y suspendiera cooperación con Cuba en el caso de que ganara.** Aunque ganó Chávez, ahora está luchando contra cáncer y las cosas no se le presentan muy alentadoras, además, el otro fundador del ALBA, Castro, no le queda mucho de vida. La pérdida de estos líderes que se han mostrado tan desafiantes ante el neoliberalismo daría un golpe muy fuerte al avance de la izquierda en América Latina.

Esta es una época muy turbulenta para la oposición al neoliberalismo, para seguir avanzando el liderazgo del ALBA necesita savia nueva. Sin Chávez y Castro el ALBA será mucho más vulnerable a los ataques de los EEUU y no sé si el sucesor oficial de Chávez, Nicolás Maduro, con su falta de carisma, es el más indicado para esa tarea.

[http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/salaprensa/readesp.tpl.html&newsid\\_obj\\_id=214&newsid\\_temas=58](http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/salaprensa/readesp.tpl.html&newsid_obj_id=214&newsid_temas=58)

[http://www.ftaa-alca.org/View\\_e.asp](http://www.ftaa-alca.org/View_e.asp) - ALCA

<http://www.alianzabolivariana.org/index.php> - ALBA

[http://21stcenturysocialism.com/article/alba\\_latin\\_americas\\_anti-imperialist\\_economic\\_project\\_01110.html](http://21stcenturysocialism.com/article/alba_latin_americas_anti-imperialist_economic_project_01110.html) - ALBA

## APPENDIX 2: RUTH (12/12/2013)

Quería analizar si hay una alternativa a neoliberalismo o no. Todavía la mayoría del poder en América Lantina se queda en las manos de neoliberalismo, con Presidentes como Hugo Chávez en Venezuela. La población vota por estos líderes, pero como James Petras cree, este es debido del sistema electoral y el período de



la campaña electoral y no representa lo que la gente quiere.<sup>1</sup> Y la realidad puede ser vista antes las elecciones cuando las personas son descontentas con las políticas del gobierno.

Podemos ver que la gente quiere cambio y quiere algo que ofrece más apoyo por los pobres. Y es fácil ver por qué, la pobreza y desempleo son problemas muy grandes en la región y también es la desigualdad. Bell Lara y López dan el ejemplo de desigualdad entre el 1% más rico y el 1% más pobre en América Latina entre 1975 & 1990; “en 1980 la diferencia entre ambos grupos era de 237 a 1” y en 1995 la diferencia ha crecido a 417 a 1.

La gente expresa la necesidad por cambio con protestas, huelgas y manifestaciones. Cosas como así, son normalmente lideradas por la izquierda. ¿Es posible que este sea una manera viable para crear cambio político y económico? En mi opinión, no. Estas protestas no tienen dirección suficiente para crear una revolución, son contra políticas y decisiones no regímenes. Para tener éxito, los líderes de la (‘más’) izquierda, necesitan volverse un opción más viable dentro del sistema electoral.

Pero aún con un cambio de líder, no sé si es posible escapar a neoliberalismo. **Estoy de acuerdo con Bell Lara y López cuando dicen que cosas al fuera de América del Sud juegan un papel importante.** Con las normas y reglamentos del FMI es difícil ver alternativas económicas.

Quizás es necesario que estos países latinoamericanos usen módulos diferentes de países y regiones diferentes como Asia.

También, una pregunta para vosotros. He leído un artículo<sup>2</sup> donde el autor expone que algunos países podrían recurrir de nuevo a un gobierno autoritario. ¿Creéis que es posible?

### **APPENDIX 3: KELLY (10/01/2013)**

Tampoco estoy de acuerdo contigo que las elecciones electorales no representan lo que la gente quieren. En mi opinión, después de décadas de la lucha, los pueblos de América Latina finalmente eliminaron el gobierno militar, inicialmente establecieron el sistema democrático. Sin embargo, debido a la falta de una base democrática amplia, este sistema democrático sólo puede permanecer

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/2634237>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2003/09/is-neoliberalism-dead-in-latin-america>



en la fase primaria. Los ciudadanos sólo tienen el derecho de elegir el gobierno a través del voto y la política, pero no tienen participación democrática en la gestión y supervisión del gobierno.

Sin embargo, estoy de acuerdo contigo que en América Latina existe la pobreza y el desempleo. Creo que el ajuste estructural del modelo neo-liberal lleva una serie de problemas sociales en América Latina. Destaca la brecha entre ricos y pobres que es cada vez mayor. Por poner un ejemplo, la pobreza en América Latina pasó del 42,5% de la población total en el año 2000 al 44'2% en el año 2003, equivale a decir que hoy en día hay nada menos 224 millones de personas que viven en América Latina y el Caribe con menos de dos dólares al día (umbral de pobreza). Y unos 98 millones de personas (19.4% de la población) encuentran en situación de pobreza extrema o indigencia, pues, viven con menos de un dólar al día.

Ruth cree que las protestas, huelgas y manifestaciones no pueden ser una manera viable para crear cambio político y económico. No estoy totalmente de acuerdo con él. Los pueblos indígenas y campesinos de Bolivia, Perú, Ecuador, Guatemala y México, los sindicatos de México, Argentina, Chile y Brasil, así como las organizaciones de mujeres de los países de América Latina, salieron a las calles en protesta. Estas personas constituyen un apoyo público fuerte de los partidos de izquierda. En este punto, estoy de acuerdo con Jacques que las huelgas y manifestaciones pueden ser para hacer camino de cambio social y económico. Por ejemplo, Venezuela está experimentando una práctica nueva del socialismo, una serie de medidas de reforma política de Chávez tiene tintes socialistas. Desde 2005, "Socialismo del siglo 21" convertida en una palabra que aparece en boca de Chávez con la mayor frecuencia. Chávez dijo que el objetivo de Venezuela es el desarrollo de la democracia participativa en la política y en la economía el desarrollo de la propiedad colectiva para reducir la brecha entre ricos y pobres, y lograr la social equidad.

En cuanto a la siguiente pregunta: ¿El renacimiento de las fuerzas de la izquierda puede convertir realmente en el bienestar de la gente de las clases bajas y medias en América Latina? La respuesta es sí, pero, este cambio es limitado. La mayoría de los países de América Latina tienen una carga pesada de deuda y una fuerte dependencia del capital internacional, para reactivar la economía, aún es necesario que las instituciones financieras internacionales proporcionen préstamos y asistencia, no es probable que el gobierno de izquierda se libere por



completo de los organismos financieros internacionales para encontrar otra salida.

Por eso cómo ajustar la actual política económica sobre la base de la justicia social es el principal problema que enfrentan en el futuro los gobiernos de izquierda de América Latina.

<http://www.costabonino.com/democracia.htm>

[http://www.marini-escritos.unam.mx/018\\_democracia\\_es.htm](http://www.marini-escritos.unam.mx/018_democracia_es.htm)

[http://www.revistafuturos.info/futuros\\_8/pobreza1.htm](http://www.revistafuturos.info/futuros_8/pobreza1.htm)

<http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a29740.html>

#### **APPENDIX 4: JOE (13/01/2013)**

En mi opinión hay alternativas al modelo neoliberal en América Latina. Lo más interesante y sostenible, tal vez, es *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* o ALBA. Esta organización, es basada en la cooperación económica y política de países latinoamericanos. Se inició por el presidente venezolano Hugo Chávez y su homólogo cubano Fidel Castro en 2004, hoy en día la organización está compuesta por ocho países latinoamericanos.

Para continuar y como se ha mencionado, la organización se formó de intereses económicos. La primera interacción produjo un intercambio entre los dos miembros fundadores, Venezuela y Cuba. Todo comenzó con el intercambio de recursos médicos y educativos y el petróleo entre ambas naciones. Venezuela suministra unos 96.000 barriles de petróleo por día a partir de sus operaciones petroleras estatales a Cuba a precios muy favorables. A cambio, Cuba envió 20.000 empleados por el Estado el personal médico y miles de maestros a los estados más pobres de Venezuela. Además, los venezolanos también pueden viajar a Cuba para la atención médica especializada gratuita.

Hoy en día la organización y sus ocho países disfrutan los beneficios de este tipo de unión político y económico. Como se indica en el sitio web oficial del ALBA 'Son tratados de intercambio de bienes y servicios para satisfacer las necesidades de los pueblos.' Asimismo, el proceso de integración va más allá de las palabras vacías de una declaración de misión. Esto se puede ver a través del acuerdo exitoso e implementación de 'Tratados de Comercio de los Pueblos y los Proyectos y Empresas Transnacionales'. Este documento es una manifestación de la voluntad de las naciones participantes a cooperar sobre la base del comercio y



libertad de movimiento, tanto como el Tratado de Maastricht de 1993 fue para la Unión Europea.

Por añadidura, hay otras razones por que esta organización es la más adecuada y sostenible como un modelo alternativo al neoliberalismo. Muchas personas en la región creen que desde hace mucho tiempo su destino económico ha estado a merced de poderosas naciones políticas, en particular la de Estados Unidos. ALBA explica que ‘Los TCP nacen, para enfrentar a los TLC, Tratados de Libre Comercio, impuestos por Estados Unidos, que conducen al desempleo y la marginación de nuestros pueblos, por la destrucción de las economías nacionales, a favor de la penetración del gran capital imperialista’. No es secreto que los líderes como Chávez tienen un desprecio personal por lo que consideran una monopolización intentada del “mercado libre” por los EE.UU.

Además, la mención de ‘nuestros pueblos’ es significativa. Por supuesto ALBA es centrada por la región y las naciones en su interior. Aunque se puede argumentar que Chávez está tratando de ejercer su propia influencia sobre la región, no estoy de acuerdo. En mi opinión es una organización intergubernamental en cual los países pueden beneficiarse de la ruptura de las barreras arancelarias y comerciales. El reto consiste en lo que promete, para moldear estas medidas en un cambio social tangible y mejorar la forma de vida de los pobres. Esta será la retórica a la que se evaluará el éxito del ALBA.

Munck, R (2003) *Contemporary Latin America*, Basingstoke, Palgrave

<http://alianzabolivariana.org/index.php>

[http://www.ftaa-alca.org/alca\\_e.asp](http://www.ftaa-alca.org/alca_e.asp)

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/america\\_latina/2009/10/091017\\_2012\\_alba\\_final\\_jrg.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/america_latina/2009/10/091017_2012_alba_final_jrg.shtml)

## APPENDIX 5: ALANNA (28/01/2013)

Durante la "Década Perdida" las políticas neoliberales fueron adoptado por gobiernos latinoamericanos para tratar de mejorar las economías de los países endeudados. En su lugar, neoliberalismo provocó protestas sociales contra el aumento de los precios de servicios públicos debido a la hiperinflación, así como la creciente polarización social. Una gran cantidad de personas en la región consideran los ideas neoliberales a la raíz de muchos problemas de América Latina, como la desigualdad y las revueltas sociales. Es evidente que los ideales neoliberales como la privatización no funcionaban y por eso, ¿es el



neoliberalismo la mejor manera de proceder para América Latina, o hay alguna otra alternativa?

Estoy totalmente de acuerdo con Bell Lara y Lopez. Es claro para mí que hay otras alternativas del neoliberalismo. Obviamente, se necesita una alternativa. Esto, cmi parece, es ya presente en la forma del ALBA (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América), creada en 2004 por el presidente venezolano Hugo Chávez y Fidel Castro de Cuba. El acuerdo fue originalmente un intercambio entre Venezuela y Cuba de los recursos médicos y educativos para el petróleo, en torno a la idea de la integración regional.

Hoy en día, los ocho estados miembros (Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Dominica, Antigua y Barbuda, Ecuador, San Vicente y las Granadinas y Bolivia) todavía se benefician de esta integración regional, presentando un frente unido en los temas económicos y políticos, además de beneficiarse de sus propios acuerdos comerciales.

El ALBA es un reto contra el ALCA patrocinada por los EE.UU, lo que permite la independencia de América Latina de los EE.UU y el FMI. Se puede considerar como una alternativa al neoliberalismo, ya que se centra alrededor de la unidad anti-imperialista y anti-capitalista, y alienta la promoción de alternativas de políticas económicas y sociales. Promueve la creación de nuevas relaciones entre los países basados en la solidaridad, la igualdad, la justicia y la integración.

<http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/49622>

<http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/6745>

## BIODATA

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