

# Linguistic Competence



For the 2021 LMSA's National Conference, I was fortunately able to recruit **Doctora Pilar Ortega**, for my theme of linguistic competence.

She is a board-certified Emergency Physician and medical educator and the author of *Spanish and the Medical Interview* (2nd Ed., 2015), a textbook for providers to learn to communicate with Spanish-speaking patients. In 2020, she also founded a new non-profit academic organization called the National Association of Medical Spanish and is the principal investigator for multiple national studies.

She has plenty of other achievements that could easily fill up this column, but I wanted to highlight her responses to some of my questions on linguistic competency in medical school:

***What is your recommendation for a proficiency assessment for our medical students?***

**Dr. Ortega:** This is such a great question and unfortunately represents a gap in medical Spanish tools. Fortunately, however, we are working on resolving that gap. Currently, I am on a research team validating a medical Spanish proficiency assessment tool that can be used to evaluate proficiency using standardized patient encounters rated by trained raters (who we are training). However, the tool will likely come out in about 1 year and you probably want to know what you can do in the meantime.

I would suggest two possibilities (and you could combine them).

1) Create a standardized patient (SP) encounter at your school and use it to provide feedback to learners. Even if you don't have the formal tool yet, it takes some time to hire and train SPs and so you might as well get started with this process. Secondly, while we don't yet have the tool to assess language proficiency, we do have a tool to assess interpersonal skills which can be completed now in Spanish by the SPs or by patients -- just published:

Ortega P, Moxon NR, Chokshi AK, Pérez-Cordón C, Park YS. Validity Evidence Supporting the Comunicación y Habilidades Interpersonales (CAI) Scale for Medical Spanish Communication and Interpersonal Skills Assessment [published online ahead of print, 2021 Aug 3]. *Acad Med.* 2021;10.1097/ACM.0000000000004266.  
doi:10.1097/ACM.0000000000004266

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**Dr. Ortega:** Additionally, you could involve someone from the Language/Spanish Department on the University side at your school who might be able to provide other ways/expertise in conducting oral proficiency evaluations of your learners. The downside here is that these are not medically contextualized.

2) Consider taking the CCLA exam. It's the only validated exam that assesses healthcare Spanish skills and it's done as an oral exam over the phone. It is conducted by a commercial company and there is a cost involved. More info here: <https://www.altalang.com/language-testing/ccla/>

## On Medical Students and Clinicians becoming Certified Interpreters:

**Dr. Ortega:** I would absolutely *not* recommend for any clinician to take an interpreter exam. Students, even those who take medical Spanish, should NOT be interpreters. They should be learning to be physicians. Interpreter exams focus on very different skills and would not adequately reflect the skills that physicians need to communicate directly with patients.

To Learn More About Dr. Ortega's Work, Subscribe to the **Medical Spanish Taskforce Newsletter:**

[LINK](#)

*The first issue included the following information:*

### RESOURCES / RECURSOS

Feel free to download our list of recent publications (peer-reviewed articles, books, conference abstracts, and more!) related to medical Spanish [here!](#)

### 6th Latino Health Summit - Building Toward Latino Health Equity

<https://hispanic-health.org/>  
September 29 - October 1, 2021

### Medical Spanish Masterclass - Free 10-Day Spanish for Healthcare Masterclass

Common Ground International is putting on its FREE 10-day Medical Spanish Masterclass in September. They only offer it 2x/year: <https://commongroundinternational.com/medical-spanish/healthcare-spanish-masterclass/>

-Violeta Osegueda

Hola!