

“In Living Color: Studying Spanish in Sevilla”

**Name:** Karliana B. Sakas

**Year of Study:** 2004-2005

**Academic Major:** Spanish and History

**University:** Sweet Briar Collage

**ESSAY:**

***In Living Color: Studying Spanish in Sevilla***

Before I came to Seville to study as a student of Sweet Briar College's Junior Year in Spain Program, I knew Spanish from books, from movies, and from people who had walked along the streets of Seville when the orange trees are in bloom. I knew thousands of vocabulary words and was familiar with nearly every grammatical structure, but the language seemed to be like a black and white photograph—beautiful in its own way, but lacking the vivid colors of real-life.

When I arrived in the city of Seville, my sense of the Spanish language took on rainbow hues as I began assigning memories to words and phrases that had always been a bit too colloquial for me to grasp intellectually. It was 110° F in September when I made my first connection between saying and reality: *Hace calor*, literally, it makes hot. And it was hot, for weeks and weeks. *Tengo hambre*, I have hunger, a sentence I said as I adjusted to eating lunch at 4:00 and dinner at 11:30. As the weather cooled down and I came to appreciate the Spanish eating schedule, my sensed sayings have become more abstract and not so readily translatable into English. *Me hace ilusión*, (To me, it makes a dream) to express fervent desires or to describe delighted reactions. Now, instead of wishing I could translate English expressions into Spanish, I wish I could use my newly-learned Spanish sayings in English.

When I first got to Seville, the lisped “Z” and slurred vowels of the Andalucians were so difficult to understand that I wondered if Andaluz was its own language, just like Catalan. My American Spanish seemed equally incomprehensible to Andalucians, who would listen, and then ask me, “What part of the United States are you from?” With much practice and patience on the part of my friends, I have softened my “S” and lisp my “Z,” and never end a word with a

consonant. When surprised, I say, “*uhuy*” instead of “whoops,” and when something is cool, I say it is *chulo*. Even the once-mystifying subjunctive makes sense after hearing it used every day.

Speaking Spanish has become so natural that in addition to my history and literature classes, I am learning two foreign languages: Russian, which I started in Seville, and Turkish, a continuation of my studies at Sweet Briar College. The language of instruction in both classes is Spanish, so I write my notes and translations in Spanish. Every time I try to say a simple sentence in Russian or try to express a complex idea in Turkish, Spanish words come quickly to mind, making me realize how vividly I know Spanish, and how much studying and living the language remains to be done before I can speak Turkish or Russian in rainbow-colored tones.

I bring my improved language skills to the classrooms of the University of Sevilla, where I take regular university courses. My Spanish classes at my home university gave me the literary and linguistic background to understand and enjoy advanced classes offered by the Philology Department. Professor Deweese’s kind invitation to attend a literary conference in Puerto Santa María allowed me the incomparable opportunity of interacting with Spanish authors and critics. Meeting the people behind the books and articles gave me a greater sense of what literature can be—not just a debate between readers, it is also a conversation with the creator.

Just as my sense of Spanish language and literature has been colored by my studies in Spain, my sense of history is excited by the presence and preservation of historic spaces and buildings in Seville. When I leave my history classroom at the University of Seville and walk across the Triana Bridge, I am walking into postcards of the past as I pass over the very same river navigated by conquistadors and their descendants. The Giralda, the belfry of the cathedral and, previously the minaret of Seville’s mosque, towers above all other buildings in the city, a

reminder of Spain's history of *convivencia*. Even the site of a history conference I attended on the politics of Alfonso the Wise took place in a medieval castle. History in the air of Seville, or, at the very least, beneath my feet, as the construction work for the much-anticipated Metro keeps unearthing layers of Roman, Visigothic and Muslim occupation.

I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to finally connect my years of Spanish study with in-country experiences to more deeply appreciate the beauty of the language, the intricacies of the literature, and the proximity of Spain's past. My experiences studying in Seville turned my textbook snapshots of Spanish language and culture into a motion picture. The best part of the movie of, course, is the end: there is none, because speaking Spanish fluently is the first scene in a whole new series of exciting and enriching experiences at home and abroad.