Dimension 2013

World Language Learning: Setting the Global Standard

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Lauren Davidson
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Paula Garrett-Rucks
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Editors
Peter B. Swanson
Georgia State University

Kristin Hoyt
Kennesaw State University

Dimension is the annual volume of peer-reviewed articles sponsored by 2013 Joint Conference of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching, the Alabama Association of Foreign Language Teachers, and the Southeastern Association of Language Learning Technology.
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Review and Acceptance Procedures

SCOLT Dimension

The co-editors of Dimension 2013 invited prospective authors at all levels of language teaching to submit original work for publication consideration without having to commit to presenting a paper at the 2013 annual meeting of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching. This ushers in a new practice for SCOLT Dimension that will be carried forward in the upcoming years. Language educators and program administrators from a broad range of P-12, postsecondary, and other language-focused programs and institutions are encouraged to submit scholarly articles reflecting traditional and classroom-based research as well as others topics of interest to the profession by notifying the co-editors at SCOLT.Dimension@gmail.com by July 1st.

The names and academic affiliations of the authors and information identifying schools and colleges cited in articles are removed from the manuscripts prior to review by members of the Editorial Board, all of whom are professionals committed to second language education. The initial draft of each manuscript is reviewed by at least two members of the Editorial Board of Reviewers, and one of the following recommendations is made: “accept as is,” “request a second draft with minor revisions,” “request a second draft with major revisions,” or “do not publish.” The co-editors then request second drafts of manuscripts that receive favorable ratings on the initial draft. These revised manuscripts are reviewed a second time before a final decision to publish is made.

All submissions for Dimension 2013 were read and evaluated by at least three selected members of the Editorial Board of Reviewers in addition to the co-editors. The reviewers represent as many areas of the foreign language teaching profession as possible. Every attempt was made to send the article to reviewers who have expertise in the subject addressed in the article.
SCOLT Editorial Review Board 2013

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Introduction

The Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT) held its annual conference April 11-13, 2013, at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex in Birmingham, Alabama, in collaboration with the Alabama Association of Language Association Teachers (AAFLT) and the Southeastern Association of Language Learning Technology (SEALLT). As a change to previous years regarding the submission of manuscripts for publication in Dimension, the SCOLT Board approved a new policy to allow authors to submit original work without having presented at the annual conference. Such a change now moves Dimension from a proceedings publication to an edited volume of peer-reviewed research. In this year’s volume, there are ten articles that offer a cross-section of classroom-based inquiry, survey research, and qualitative research on curricular topics, instructional approaches, and pedagogical beliefs and practices.

Chapters 1 through 3 focus on curriculum as it relates to specific course offerings in particular contexts. The first two articles were published last year in digital format and are presented here in print. Lauren Davidson, family medicine resident at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, and Sheri Spaine Long, Professor of Spanish with dual affiliation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado (Distinguished Visiting Professor) lead off the volume with “Medical Spanish for U.S. Medical Students: A Pilot Case Study.” In their article, they describe a one-week pilot course at The University of Alabama School of Medicine that aims to expand the teaching of medical Spanish to medical students. “From Orality to Literacy: A Curricular Model for Intensive Second-Year Collegiate Language Instruction” discusses a curricular reform of the second-year German program at the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. As a response to institutional incentives to intensify and accelerate language programs, the department decided to replace the two three-credit-hour course sequence that previously represented the second year of German language instruction with a single intensive, accelerated six-credit-hour course. Per Urlaub (UT-Austin) and Jan Uelzmann (Georgia Institute of Technology), describe the process and provide detailed information regarding the changes. Chapter 3 is also of curricular interest as Lealane Sanders (Ware County High School, Georgia) and David Alley (Georgia Southern University) examine the academic experiences of heritage Spanish-speakers who were placed inappropriately in a traditional Spanish class for non-Spanish speakers at the secondary level in “The Academic Experiences of Native Spanish Speakers in the Traditional Spanish Classroom.” The authors find that the needs of these students differ from those of non-native speakers, and the type of class in which they enroll should reflect such differences and needs.

The next cluster of three articles features classroom-based studies that bring to light unique pedagogical practices that reflect both secondary and post-secondary contexts. In “Using Dictogloss to Advance Proficiency and Accuracy in Teaching Arabic,” Ghassan Husseiniali (George Mason University) contributes a classroom study on the use of Dictogloss to foster students’ awareness of language forms and to advance their accuracy in meaningful language production. Centered in an interme-
Husseinali’s research yielded positive benefits for students as a learner-centered pedagogical approach. In Chapter Five, Laura Droms (Gwinnett County Schools, Georgia) offers compelling findings from an experimental study, “Effect of Interactive Note-taking on Increasing Rigor and Student Achievement for High-School Foreign Language.” She examines a largely unexplored area of research in her study on the implementation of interactive note-taking techniques in the foreign language classroom. Droms examined several variables including test performance, critical thinking skills, confidence in note-taking, and level of classroom participation, in her comparison of high-school Spanish students in a class where interactive note-taking strategies were integrated to those in a class taught with traditional approaches. In his article “Online Translator Usage in Foreign Language Writing,” Errol O’Neill (University of Memphis) explores the effects of online translator usage in the classroom. The author presents findings from a study where raters were able to determine when online translation was used by students. However, in a number of cases, online translation went undetected.

In Chapters 7 through 10 the authors present studies centering on curriculum and instruction. In “Encouraging TAs to Embrace Communicative Language Teaching: An Investigation of Pre-service Training Practices,” Paula Garrett-Rucks (Georgia State University) and Kerri McCoy (Autrey Mill Middle School, Georgia) report on research that substantiates the effectiveness of well-designed pre-service training for teaching assistants to support communicative language teaching and foster teacher self-confidence and self-efficacy. This comprehensive study contributes to current topics in the profession, including the influence of communicative language teaching in buttressing the retention and progression of students in language programs, and the critical role of sound teacher training and professional development opportunities for language teachers in supporting effective pedagogical practices. Christina Huhn (Indiana University of Pennsylvania) reports on a follow-up study to her article published in Dimension 2011. In this year’s article, “Evaluating Effective Teaching in the 21st Century World Language Classroom,” she reports that while teachers incorporate a variety of appropriate activities into their classrooms, and both believe in the value of the Standards and use them in lesson planning, their implementation of standards-based assessments continues to lag behind. Kelly Moser (Mississippi State University), Jennifer Weir (University of Southern Mississippi), and Krista Chambless (University of Alabama at Birmingham) bring another perspective to the theme of teachers’ beliefs and practices in their article, “A Snapshot of their Beliefs and Practices: Perspectives of Mississippi and Alabama Spanish Teachers.” In their survey study of Spanish teachers in the 20 largest school districts in Alabama and Mississippi, they investigated teacher beliefs about their preparation, proficiency, and practices within and beyond the classroom context. They report a disparity between teacher beliefs and classroom practice. The final article is an editor-invited article by William Worden (University of Alabama). In his article, “Staying in the Target Language While Teaching Middle School and High School,” he advocates for the use of the target language at all times in the classroom at all levels of language instruction. He describes an approach to language instruction that can be implemented for students of all ages and discusses ways to help students thrive in an all-target-language classroom.
Kristin Hoyt (Kennesaw State University) was invited to serve as co-editor of *Dimension 2013*. Dr. Hoyt is known in the foreign language community for having served as Indiana’s State Foreign Language Coordinator as well as her work researching intercultural competence and training tomorrow’s language teachers in Georgia.

This year, the editors worked collaboratively with the Editorial Review Board in a double blind, peer-review process and would like to extend their gratitude to the members of the Editorial Review Board for having shared their time, knowledge, and expertise reviewing the articles for *Dimension 2013*. These individuals represent prestigious institutions and are leaders in their field. The publication timeline required to create each volume of *Dimension* is rather short, and the members of the Editorial Review Board worked diligently giving of their time over the summer months to advance the process. SCOLT sincerely appreciates their commitment to *Dimension*.

On behalf of the editorial team, we trust that readers will find the articles in this edition informative and inspiring. During the conference, please thank the authors for contributing their work to *Dimension*; thank the current and former reviewers for assisting their colleagues in the preparation of the articles; and thank the SCOLT Sponsors and Patrons for their ongoing financial support that makes *Dimension* possible.

The Editors

Peter B. Swanson  Kristin Hoyt
*Georgia State University*  *Kennesaw State University*
Medical Spanish for U.S. Medical Students: A Pilot Case Study

Lauren Davidson
University of Massachusetts Medical School

Sheri Spaine Long
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Abstract
In an effort to expand the teaching of medical Spanish to medical students, a one-week pilot course was developed and implemented at The University of Alabama School of Medicine (UASOM) in January 2010. Objectives included offering a refresher course in Spanish for medical students before third-year clerkships and providing a model for medical schools interested in developing medical Spanish courses. The pilot course included the teaching of Spanish language and related cultural information to students at varying levels of Spanish proficiency by an experienced Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP) instructor. Students completed an evaluation to suggest future directions for the course. The results suggest that a medical Spanish course for medical students can indeed be added to U.S. medical school curricula.

Introduction

We use language to communicate thoughts and information and to reveal our needs (Modern Language Association, 2007). In the medical field, language is a critical tool for delivering and receiving quality care.

In the U.S., many pre-medical students enroll in Spanish courses in secondary school and in college. Some medical students have taken Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP) courses prior to medical school, but still lack the specialized vocabulary and specific Spanish language skills or proficiency level needed to interact with and care for their Spanish-speaking patients appropriately. Many medical students with some experience in the Spanish language seek out opportunities to maintain, practice, and expand these skills; however, these students find few options to do so during medical school, as specific courses in medical Spanish are typically absent from U.S. medical school curricula.

A review of the recent literature points to a deficit in high quality health care available to Spanish-speaking patients in the U.S. because of the inability of physicians and other health care providers to communicate effectively in languages other than English (Morales, Cunningham, Brown, & Hays, 1994). As of July 1, 2006, the Hispanic population in the U.S. totaled 44.8 million, which is 14.8% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006), making Spanish-speaking patients a part of any physician's practice.
Medical students have limited curricular and extra-curricular time for formal and informal language acquisition and maintenance. Because of time-constraints, there are few options to add Spanish classes to medical school curricula. To begin to work toward a solution, we developed a brief pilot course in medical Spanish for medical students, which took place at The University of Alabama School of Medicine in January 2010.¹

A way to develop, fund, and pilot a medical Spanish course at UASOM became available through a program called the Scholarly Research Activity (SRA).² The only course length available for medical Spanish elective was a one-week intensive course. A course of this type has yet to be documented in the literature.

**Literature Review**

Although the literature pertaining to the success of teaching medical Spanish to medical students is limited, there are a few institutions that have provided models of such courses. No medical schools offered the same one-week format as the UASOM pilot. The following models illustrate the demand for medical Spanish as well as a variety of responses. They show that the Spanish and the medical professions have indeed begun to work together. Because of the scarcity of comparable courses, we include examples that describe Spanish language education targeting undergraduate pre-medical students, medical students, medical residents, and established physicians, although the pilot course at this institution was taught to medical students alone.

The need for improved communication between health care providers and Spanish-speaking patients has been well documented by Morales et al. (1994): “Unsatisfactory communication […] may result in lower quality of health care and poorer treatment outcomes” (p. 414). Some suggestions for improving communication between physicians and Spanish-speaking patients include “teaching medical Spanish to health care providers, educating health care providers about the health beliefs and practices of their patients, and developing clinical practice guidelines that ensure cultural competence” (Morales et al., 1994, p. 415).

The practice of teaching Spanish to established physicians has proven to increase patient satisfaction as well as decrease physician reliance on professional interpreters (Mazor, Hampers, Chande, & Krug, 2002). As future physicians, medical students should understand the importance of relying on professional interpreters when necessary. “Ensuring adequate clinician-patient communication is the clinician’s responsibility, and time inefficiencies or other barriers should not become reasons to carry out inadequate communication” (Yawman et al., 2006, p. 472). At times, physicians may resort to using patients’ family members as interpreters. This can lead to a high rate of errors in translation/interpretation, which may or may not have an impact on the medical care received (Prince & Nelson, 1995).

Prince and Nelson (1995) also comment that

> Although one possible solution to the lack of interpreters is to increase the number of bilingual health care providers […] attempts to increase the number of ethnic minorities have not been successful. Another solution would be to train health care providers to speak a second language. Unfortunately, these researchers were unable to find
many programs that have implemented such an approach. (p. 35-36)

The researchers of this study faced similar difficulties when searching for programs that have implemented Spanish courses, which lead to a belief that additions to the current literature describing courses at such programs would be beneficial to both academic and medical communities.

The literature establishes a rationale to teach medical Spanish to future physicians. Next it became necessary to identify the best way to accomplish this additional instruction. There have been various medical Spanish courses offered in the U.S. during the past few decades. A groundbreaking course in this field is described by González-Lee and Simon (1987) at the University of California in San Diego, School of Medicine, which took place in 1984. The course targeted second-year medical students and consisted of twelve to fifteen hours per week for three elective courses over three consecutive quarters of the academic year. Native Spanish-speaking physician preceptors permitted students to interview four to five Spanish-speaking patients per week, offering opportunities to practice Spanish within a medical and cross-cultural context. They also employed dialogues designed to facilitate the process of obtaining a medical history. This course was beneficial for students with minimal Spanish-language experience as it encouraged the development of skills useful for establishing rapport and thereby improving physician-patient interaction.

Another possible course option includes a longitudinal format that spans the full four-year medical school curriculum. At the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, medical students with intermediate to advanced Spanish language skills took part in didactic sessions, clinical role-playing, service-learning activities, and simulated patient cases. These students felt that the program “helped them to maintain or improve their Spanish-speaking and listening skills and to acquire medically relevant vocabulary” (Reuland, Frasier, Slat, & Alemán, 2008, p. 1035).

At the undergraduate level, universities across the U.S. have expanded their SSP courses to include medical Spanish. These courses are provided for students with previous Spanish instruction who may need to use these skills at a specific professional level in the future. The institution associated with UASOM offers one of the few SSP certificate programs in the nation at the undergraduate level. SSP courses allow the integration of general Spanish language skills with specific, professionally related Spanish instruction (Sánchez-López, 2010).

There are also options for Spanish language acquisition and maintenance in the private sector that are marketed to the medical community. One example is Ríos Associates that has been offering Continuing Medical Education courses in medical Spanish since 1983. They offer both four-day weekend courses in the U.S., as well as eight-day courses in Mexico. They focus on immersion in the Spanish language and include medically relevant vocabulary and grammar taught through games, role-playing, and group activities. Such courses are unique because a third party provider, not an academic institution, offers them. Additionally, they have an enrollment fee associated with them (Ríos Associates, 2010).³ There are also a number of study abroad providers such as Spanishabroad.com and Amerispan.com that offer medical Spanish abroad to students and health care professionals at a cost to the individual.

Beyond the medical field, there are short courses in Spanish offered in the business field routinely. There are examples of short courses in business offered by a
variety of educational institutions including Phoenix College, Boise State and the Community College of Rhode Island and by employers such as Wachovia (Fajt, 2006; McCain, Ray, & Ellsworth, 2010; Phoenix College, 2008; Sign up for free preview, 2011). However, there is no evidence in the literature of a specific weeklong course in business Spanish for multi-level learners that can provide a curricular model or outcomes relevant to the present study. What studies in business and medical Spanish do have in common is that they document the need for these types of courses. The demand has been driven by societal needs over the last few decades. Because of the popularity of applied Spanish, there is pressure to simply be able to offer business and medical Spanish classes. Apparently the achievement of delivering these specific types of Spanish classes has overshadowed the necessity to document what they can provide to the learner and how best to deliver them.

Doyle points out the change from a traditional language-literature curriculum to the increasingly popular languages for specific purposes programs, and he traces the development of the business language curriculum during the last twenty years (Doyle, 2010). This shift and the establishment of language learning as a national priority by the Clinton administration have intensified the necessity of providing Spanish in a variety of formats (Coria-Sánchez, 2007). From the viewpoint of the traditional language educator, the unorthodox layout of a one-week language course that focuses on business or medicine is likely to be quickly discounted as an unviable set-up for language learning due to the short length. However, if language educators do not consider the need for non-traditional language learning and learners, the language education field may be missing a critical opportunity to expand (Doyle, 2010). There is a need to offer, develop, and conduct research on short courses in applied medical and business Spanish in order to improve to the future curricula, learning outcomes as well as to extend the limited existing body of research.

The Pilot Course

A pilot case study was proposed and formulated at UASOM and was made available to second-year medical students interested in improving their medical Spanish language skills. Students enrolled voluntarily and earned one Special Topics credit for participation in this pilot course. Special Topics courses include mini-courses (one, two, or three weeks each) in many medical specialties and subspecialties, as well as the arts and humanities. The option of a medical Spanish Special Topics course was proposed by the faculty at UASOM as the only way to add medical Spanish to the curriculum, although only a small number of students would be able to enroll in the course because of individual preferences for competing electives and scheduling restraints. A one-week course was the only format approved by UASOM at that time. The researchers acknowledge that a longer sequence of language instruction is optimal according to second language acquisition research (National Standards, 2006).

This one-week intensive course took place in four-hour instructional sessions over five consecutive days in January 2010. These sessions focused on grammar, medical vocabulary, oral and aural communication, and the integration of culture relevant to Spanish-speaking patients. On each of the five days, equal time (ninety minutes each) was given to teaching specific grammar and vocabulary. Following
the direct instruction, students separated into pairs or small groups to focus on specific grammar and vocabulary by practicing dialogues and simulating the physician-patient interaction through role-playing. Instructional tools included one medical Spanish textbook, *Complete Medical Spanish* (Ríos & Fernández Torres, 2004). Topics covered in the bilingual textbook include but are not limited to greetings, chief complaints, body parts, internal organs, food/nutrition, pain, pediatrics, the emergency room, general physical, neurological and gynecologic examination, dermatology, laboratory tests, imaging studies, pharmacy and medications. The instructor also added realia such as visual aids (i.e., body part diagrams) and depictions/descriptions of clinical scenarios as additional instructional materials.

The course took place in Spanish. The instructor reported offering only occasional clarifications in English. During three class segments that were observed by the researchers, the instructor used no English. Students were evaluated based on attendance and participation in sessions. In addition, a subjective course evaluation was provided to assess effectiveness of the course and to allow students to make suggestions for future course development. There was no summative assessment of Spanish-language skills following the conclusion of the pilot course, as a statistically significant improvement in language proficiency was not expected for a course of such brief length and given the small sample size.

The primary research questions, with the corollary questions were: (1) Can a one-week intensive course in medical Spanish be added to the curriculum at a U.S. medical school? (2) What types of activities would encourage enhanced communication skills of medical students with Spanish-speaking patients? (3) At what level of Spanish can the course be taught? 

Because of the experimental nature of the SRA, a formal “needs analysis” was not performed in order to establish goals and objectives. This was the first year of SRA at UASOM as well as the first formal course in medical Spanish taught there. The need for this course was based on anecdotal evidence from experiences of the researchers and faculty at UASOM, as previously described. Participants included eight second-year medical students at UASOM. The class of 2012 was polled in May 2009 (Appendix A) to determine potential student interest in the proposed course, the availability of dates when the course could be offered, and their self-reported Spanish proficiency level. The students were presented with written descriptions of the ACTFL proficiency levels for speaking. The researchers recognize that students are not the best judge of their own level of language ability. However, we did not have ample access to the medical students prior to the first day of the course to administer any other type of proficiency level assessment. The course took place in January 2010 as this was the best time period for the SSP instructor’s schedule. Specific student demographic information is not included in this discussion because of the small sample size and privacy restrictions. The majority of students who enrolled identified themselves at the Novice-mid to Novice-high level based on ACTFL Speaking Proficiency Guidelines (1999). Also, all students self-identified as native speakers of English.

The course was taught by a native Spanish-speaking language instructor experienced in both general and medical Spanish with four years of experience of teaching Spanish for Specific Purposes at the same institution as the researchers. There
were five main course goals and objectives proposed at the beginning of the SRA (Appendix B). These stated that the students will (1) learn how to conduct a medical interview in Spanish; (2) learn how to perform a physical examination in Spanish; (3) develop cultural competency working with Spanish-speaking patients by learning how to establish rapport with patients in their native language; (4) be able to discern the need for an interpreter; and (5) understand how to work with interpreters.

The researchers acknowledge that it is important to teach medical students and physicians to understand when it is appropriate and necessary to use an interpreter. With medical students at different levels of proficiency, it is essential not to instill a false sense of their ability to communicate and potentially jeopardize the health care of Spanish-speaking patients. Because of the different proficiency levels of the students, it was important to take into consideration the average level of Spanish in the student cohort.

The mini-course was developed with input from a variety of sources. Beginning with the literature review, the researchers isolated salient portions of similar courses that have been successful in the past. This included targeting second-year medical students, using dialogues for practice (González-Lee, & Simon, 1987); history-taking, integrating didactic sessions, clinical role-playing (Reuland, Frasier, Slat & Alemán, 2008); and utilization of a SSP instructor (Sánchez-López, 2010). Formal interviews were conducted with two experts in the field of teaching SSP and one expert in the field of teaching medical Spanish at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, as well as one expert in the field of minority health at UAB. These interviews helped determine key elements in the course design, including what areas should be focused on or eliminated during the short course. For example, the need for students to understand when and how to use professional interpreters was scaled back due to limited time. Decisions about course curriculum were influenced by the adoption of an accessible and concise textbook and available realia to be used during instructional sessions. Also, the scope and sequence of the pilot course were shaped by the general curriculum used when teaching medical students how to gather patient historical information and perform a physical examination in English in the first and second years at U.S. medical schools.

Each day, the instructor dedicated ninety minutes each of teaching time to specific vocabulary and grammar. This included basic grammar such as verb conjugation, interrogative words, adjectives, pronouns, as well as themed vocabulary (i.e., taking a history, performing a physical examination), and pronunciation. Students were then given specific activities to perform that focused on form such as vocabulary and grammar practice, as well as more open-ended role-playing in pairs and small groups. This basic structure was followed each day during the weeklong course to allow for repetition and recall of learned material.

Data Collection and Findings

Because of the short course length, the small number of participants, and their varied linguistic backgrounds, it was decided that measuring potential language gains would not give an accurate representation of the success of the course. For this reason, the measurement of Spanish proficiency was not a specific goal of this course.
It was required that each student have prior experience at the introductory level of Spanish before participating in the course, which was self-reported on a questionnaire (Appendix A). Additionally, basic Spanish language skills were assessed via the online Web-based Computer Adaptive Placement Exam (WebCAPE) Foreign Language Placement Exam (WebCAPE, 2010). This exam consists of multiple-choice items and does not contain an oral or aural component.

Following course completion, review included direct observation of three instructional sessions by one of the researchers who took procedural notes on day three of the course, discussions with the course instructor, and written course evaluations completed by the students (Appendix C). By comparing written comments from students with formal interviews, the researchers were able to triangulate some data and analyze information for future directions of the course. The course evaluations focused on both general questions to assess students’ comfort level with their Spanish language skills (both in the medical and non-medical settings), as well as course-specific questions to assess instructional content and procure suggestions for improvement of future courses. In developing this course evaluation, the researchers gathered information from published sources as well as from discussions with faculty in the UAB Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and the Minority Health and Research Center at UAB.

Other than self-reporting, there were no formal measures of language proficiency levels or gains used in the evaluation of course data. The analysis of responses from formal interviews and student comments allowed the researchers to give more specific answers to the research questions.

Many medical students have studied Spanish language during their secondary and collegiate education. A course such as this pilot course helps serve as a bridge between these earlier experiences with Spanish and the experiences they will encounter during their third and fourth year clerkships. This course also helps fill a critical language-learning gap and allows students to add to their existing Spanish repertoire and basic understanding of the language by focusing on specific, medically-oriented vocabulary and grammar that can be used when interacting with Spanish-speaking patients. This course also has the potential to improve or, at the very least, help students maintain their Spanish language skills. One key outcome of this small study demonstrates that a medical Spanish course specifically targeting medical students can indeed be added to the curriculum at a U.S. medical school. This is significant because of the history of limited collaboration between faculty in U.S. medical schools and those who reside in language departments.

When comparing the research questions with data received, the researchers found that it was not possible to fully answer the second research question concerning what activities should be used to accomplish the proposed enhancement of communication abilities of medical students with Spanish-speaking patients, because of limitations of the pilot course. Given the information received from interviews with experts in the fields of SSP and teaching medical Spanish, it was clear that the classroom activities (i.e., role-playing, vocabulary practice) for teaching medical Spanish are similar to a general Spanish language course and the identification of new classroom activities for course delivery did not emerge from this study.

Since it was not feasible to split the course into different proficiency levels be-
cause of institutional limitations, it was necessary to offer a course that catered to multiple levels of Spanish-proficiency. Students were required to have prior Spanish language experience, were asked to communicate entirely in Spanish throughout the course, and were encouraged to integrate new vocabulary and grammar when simulating patient-physician interactions in the classroom with their peers. Although it was more complex to plan a course for students at multiple levels of Spanish proficiency, the instructor reported that students at higher levels of proficiency aided the students at lower levels of proficiency, which was an unforeseen benefit. The instructor also reported that it might be beneficial to split the course into two separate courses based on proficiency level. This was not possible due to the nature of this pilot course, but may be useful information for future courses. Some students enjoyed the intensity of a course that was taught primarily in Spanish, but also thought it may improve understanding if more explanations were given in English.

When the course was designed, it was decided that the course instructor would be an experienced SSP instructor who is familiar with SSP pedagogy. Another option that was considered for this course was a native-speaking physician. Although a physician would have a medically oriented perspective and would provide valuable insight for a course such as this, he/she would not be well versed in the specifics of how to teach language.

The instructor also reported that some medical students had difficulty pronouncing medical terms in Spanish, as many of these terms are cognates in English and may be spelled similarly but pronounced differently. These are terms that are easy for students to remember when conversing with their Spanish-speaking patients; however, if pronounced incorrectly, patients may not understand.

Each day the instructional session began with a unit of vocabulary, which was presented both directly and deductively, and a unit of grammar, both of which were related to taking a patient history and/or performing part of the physical examination. Students were then able to practice their communication by employing this specific vocabulary and grammar. This provided direct feedback to students regarding their understanding of the material presented. During this time, students were able to role-play and mimic the physician-patient relationship and practice both asking and answering questions, which allowed them to improve upon their oral and aural communication simultaneously.

The instructor reported that some medical students had to shift their focus away from grammar to communication. A course such as this is different from the traditional Spanish for General Purposes courses that are concerned more with grammar, reading, and writing. In the SSP course for medical students, the focus is shifted to a primary emphasis on specialized oral communication.

Integrating culture into daily sessions is beneficial to understanding the lifestyle and health beliefs of Spanish-speaking patients. In this course, specific time was not set aside to solely discuss cultural information. This information was integrated as students asked questions and as issues arose throughout the course. It is important for students to understand the manner in which their Spanish-speaking patients view society, as well as how they understand the health system in the U.S. The strategy of integrating cultural explanations into vocabulary and grammar lessons allowed for a contextualized and an efficient use of limited class session time.
Limitations and Future Directions

This course has clear limitations regarding outcomes because it was a pilot course and there was only one small class of students who were eligible and available to enroll. With certain changes being implemented in the curriculum at UASOM, in future years there could be from one to four classes available to enroll in this course. This may allow for the course to be split into various levels to customize the learning process. It would be beneficial for both the instructor and the students to split the course into multiple levels, as this would allow the instructor to better organize the course to target specific areas of need at each level.

With the time constraints of a one-week course it is difficult to balance time between presenting material and practicing implementation of newly acquired communication skills. Students were able to use class time (one hour per day for five days) to simulate patient-physician interactions. In the future it may be beneficial to add native-speaking physicians and native-speaking patients to this activity to allow students an opportunity for enhanced aural practice and to establish a more authentic context. Along these same lines, students specifically expressed a desire to have native Spanish-speakers available to assist in patient-simulation and physician-patient interaction through role-playing scenarios. It may also be beneficial to include experiential learning opportunities for the students at the conclusion of their one-week course. This may take the form of volunteering at a free clinic for Spanish-speaking patients in the metropolitan area or at one of the local hospitals or health clinics.

Although one of the course objectives was to include a discussion of when and how to use interpreters, this subject was not presented in the actual course because of time-constraints. The researchers understand the importance of such a topic and encourage the implementation of such a discussion in future courses.

Conclusions

Even with considerable interest, it did not prove easy to add a mini-course to the medical school curriculum at UASOM. To illustrate that there was a history and a desire to enhance medical Spanish on campus, a variety of medical Spanish courses had been informally proposed to the chairperson at the UAB Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at this institution between 2002 and 2009. In 2004, the undergraduate course “Spanish for Health Professionals” organized an informal, bi-monthly medical Spanish table for medical students at UASOM. This table was popular with medical students but was not sustainable over time. The one-week pilot course taught to the students at UASOM does provide one example of how medical Spanish can be taught to medical students. As mentioned previously, examples of medical Spanish courses specifically targeting medical students are rarely found in the medical language learning literature. The case study of a pilot course describing a one-week mini-course in medical Spanish offered to medical students that is embedded in a U.S. medical school curriculum has not been described previously.

Although the conclusions from a brief, pilot course are limited, this pilot course is a pioneering effort in a U.S. medical school with a curriculum that is steeped in tradition and known for excellence. The researchers anticipate that this course will be continued and refined at UASOM. This case study is an example of a starting
point for this specific type of instruction embedded in medical school education. The pilot course received positive reviews from the medical students that enrolled. Principally, the students pointed out the benefit that the course had on potentially easing their interactions with Spanish-speaking patients and boosting their willingness to communicate as they look towards beginning their clinical rotations. By enriching medical education with Spanish instruction, we support the overarching goal of enriching the medical community and improving health care in the U.S. for Spanish-speaking populations.

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Endnotes

1 In 2005, as an undergraduate Spanish major at UAB, I taught a bi-monthly medical Spanish course for medical students as a volunteer and service-learning component of the “Spanish for Health Professionals” course. Some medical students and faculty expressed a desire for additional formal Spanish language instruction as part of the curriculum at UASOM.

2 The SRA is a required component of the third-year curriculum at UASOM, in which each student devotes twelve weeks to research. Goals of the SRA include providing students with an opportunity to employ their unique skills and talents to pursue a project of their choosing under the mentorship of an expert in the field; providing mentorship and guidance for students interested in careers that integrate research, teaching, and clinical service (academic medicine); fostering development of analytical thinking skills, rational decision-making, and attention to the scientific method; enhancing communication skills and self-directed learning (UASOM, 2010). The first author of this article, Davidson, worked with her mentor, Long, to produce this study for Davidson’s SRA.

3 Ríos Associates is a private, outsourced option for Spanish language learning used by some U.S. medical schools, residency programs, and physicians.

4 Students at UASOM are required to earn five Special Topics credits during their four years of medical school. Time available for these courses occurs in six different months during their second, third, and fourth years.

5 As this research involved the planning of a pilot course, it was difficult to know whether these questions could be answered specifically because specific parameters such as course length, class size, and students’ language
levels were not apparent at the project’s outset. The researchers were intentionally vague when designing research questions at the beginning of the study and for this reason, some questions are not thoroughly answered at the study’s conclusion.

6 The WebCAPE was used for screening because of its availability on the UAB campus. Instructors at the UAB Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures administer the WebCAPE foreign language placement test (2010) for placement of undergraduate Spanish students (WebCAPE, 2010). The majority of students who enrolled in the pilot course placed themselves at the Novice-mid to Novice-high speaking proficiency level, with one student at the Intermediate level, based on ACTFL proficiency guidelines (1999).

7 At the time this course was developed, only second-year medical students were eligible to register. UASOM has changed its policy on Special Topics courses and now allows students in all four years to register for the same courses.

References


Appendix A: Initial Interest Poll

1. Would you be interested in taking a Special Topics course in medical Spanish?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Maybe

2. How much Spanish experience do you have?
   a. None
   b. High school - # years _____________
   c. College - # semesters _____________
   d. Travel abroad – Where? _________ For how long? ___________
   e. Other ____________________________________________________

3. Which week of Special Topics would you prefer?
   b. Aug. 3 – Aug. 9, 2009
4. How would you rate your Spanish level?
   a. **Novice-low**: no real functional ability, pronunciation may be unintelligible; may be able to exchange greetings, give identity and name familiar objects
   b. **Novice-high**: conversation is restricted to predictable topics necessary for survival; rely heavily on learned phrases and what they hear from others; mostly short or incomplete sentences in the present; can sometimes respond in intelligible sentences but will not be able to sustain discourse
   c. **Intermediate-low**: conversation is restricted to some of the concrete exchanges and predictable topics necessary for survival; speech is primarily reactive and struggles to answer direct questions or requests for information, but are able to ask a few appropriate questions; utterances are often hesitant and inaccurate; speech is characterized by frequent pauses and self-correction; can generally be understood by sympathetic listeners, particularly those used to non-natives
   d. **Intermediate-high**: able to exchange basic information, though hesitation and errors may occur; able to narrate and describe in major time frames using connected discourse; may exhibit some features of breakdown; may include a reduction in vocabulary or a significant amount of hesitation; can generally be understood by native speakers accustomed to dealing with non-natives, although the dominant language is still evident and gaps in communication may occur
   e. **Advanced-low**: able to handle a variety of communicative tasks, although haltingly at times, able to narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present, future) but control of aspect may be lacking at times; utterances are typically not longer than a single paragraph; structure of the dominant language is still evident in the use of false cognates, literal translations, or the oral paragraph structure of the speaker’s own language rather than that of the target language.
   f. **Advanced-high**: able to perform tasks with linguistic ease, confidence and competence, able to explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames, able to provide a structured argument but patterns of error appear, language will at times break down or prove inadequate, may resort to description or narration in place of argument or hypothesis
   g. **Superior**: able to communicate with accuracy and fluency, able to converse about a variety of topics in informal and formal settings, discuss their interests, explain complex matters with ease, fluency and accuracy

(Spanish levels adapted from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [ACTFL] Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking, 1999)
Appendix B: Course Objectives

The student will:

1. Learn how to conduct a medical interview in Spanish.
   - Chief Complaint
   - History of Present Illness
   - Past Medical History
   - Family History
   - Social History
   - Review of Systems

2. Learn how to conduct a physical examination in Spanish.
   - Naming (body parts)
   - General
   - Vital Signs
   - Skin
   - Head, Eyes, Ears, Nose, Throat
   - Neck
   - Breasts
   - Heart
   - Lungs
   - Abdomen
   - Genitourinary
   - Musculoskeletal
   - Vascular
   - Neurologic

3. Develop cultural competence working with Hispanic/Latino patients.

4. Learn how to establish rapport with patients in their native language.
   - Greetings
   - Introductions

5. Be able to discern when to use an interpreter.

6. Understand how to work with interpreters.
From Orality to Literacy: A Curricular Model for Intensive Second-Year Collegiate Language Instruction

Per Urlaub  
University of Texas-Austin  

Jan Uelzmann  
Georgia Institute of Technology

Abstract

This article documents a curriculum reform of the second-year German program at the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. This curricular reform had two goals: (1) compressing two semesters of intermediate-level language instruction into a single semester; (2) incorporating a strategy-based approach to literary reading in the second language. The article will first compare the previous curriculum and then introduce a conceptual framework for the reform process. This framework is based on three distinct pedagogical principles that the article will outline. Further, the article will describe the planning and implementation stages of the reform and trace decision-making processes that relate to the selection and design of teaching materials as well as teaching approaches that target at the intensification of the second-year curriculum. This approach emphasizes the explicit development of literary reading skills to facilitate the learners’ transition into the upper-level curriculum. We conclude with concrete recommendations for departments that embark on similar projects.

Introduction

In late 2009, the language program of the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin embarked on a reform process of the second year of language instruction. Responding to institutional incentives to intensify and accelerate language programs, the department decided to replace the two three-credit-hour course sequence that previously represented the second year of German language instruction with a single intensive, accelerated six-credit-hour course. This structural change was implemented in the fall of 2010. It provided the opportunity to rethink and re-calibrate educational objectives and teaching approaches to intermediate foreign language education.

The article documents this reform process, which was led by the department’s language program director, who was assisted by an advanced doctoral student. In addition to showing the structural differences between the old and the new curriculum, the article describes the conceptual framework that serves as a pedagogical founda-
tion for the new second-year curriculum. This conceptual framework rests on three pedagogical principles that the article describes. In addition, the article provides a detailed documentation of the planning stages and describes the implementation of the new curriculum. The article illustrates the reform process through a discussion of curricular and instructional materials, as well as an outline of a teaching approach that connects the intensified, accelerated second year of language instruction with the development of critical literacy skills. The article concludes with an outline of the limitations of our approach and provides a summary of our results in the form of a set of recommendations.

Structural Overview: Old Curriculum vs. New Curriculum

Prior to the fall semester of 2010, the second year of German language instruction was organized as a sequence of two three-credit-hour courses. This course sequence was replaced by a single accelerated six-credit-hour course. The total number of contact hours, however, has remained constant at 90 hours of instruction. In the new intensive curriculum, learners meet three times a week for 100-minute lessons, which are twice as long as the 50-minute lessons that the old curriculum used.

Conceptual framework

The new curricular structure also required a new pedagogy and provided faculty with an opportunity to rethink our ideas of collegiate second-year language instruction, to redefine educational goals, and to implement innovative teaching approaches that would help our students meet these new educational objectives. If one takes a closer look at collegiate intermediate language curricula in North America, one quickly discovers that, in contrast to beginning language instruction, there is very little consensus among practitioners about how exactly language curricula at the intermediate level ought to be organized. This lack of agreement is not only evident in the curricular materials published on departmental websites, it also manifests itself in a wide spectrum of intermediate-level textbooks, which use radically different pedagogies. In the case of German instruction in the United States, intermediate-level textbooks range from morpho-syntactic treatments of grammar (Donahue, 2008; Sparks & Vail, 2004), via textbooks that expand and deepen communicative skills developed in the first year (Augustyn & Euba, 2008), to materials that are designed to provide a bridge into a literature-centered upper-level curriculum (Motyl-Mudretzkyj & Spälinghaus, 2005; Teichert & Teichert, 2005). One of the reasons for this diversity of approaches and materials is the fact that there is no universally accepted model to represents the development of the multiple modalities that constitute intermediate- and advanced-level second-language abilities. As a result, individual departments choose educational goals, teaching approaches, and materials based on a local and often intuitive understanding of the needs of their students. Therefore, the first step of the curricular reform described in this article was a clarification of the goals of the lower-level language program based on the linguistic and literacy skills required of the learner in the upper-level courses. This redefinition had to expand beyond a purely proficiency-oriented model of linguistic skills in order to provide a pathway into the upper-level curriculum. This process resulted in the
formulation of pedagogical principles that would guide decision-making processes. In what follows, we share the educational objectives of our second year that reflect the motivational diversity of the undergraduate student population at a large public Research 1 university that has a foreign language requirement. In addition, we also describe the three pedagogical principles that guided our reform.

**Diverse Educational Objectives as a Result of Diverse Learner Motives**

In our view, the second year of a language program must serve three distinct groups of learners who have somewhat conflicted motivations. The first group, consisting of undergraduate learners who do not intend to continue with the language after the completion of the foreign language requirement, forms the majority of language students in lower-division language classes at virtually all institutions that have a language requirement (Davis, Gorell, Kline, & Hsieh, 1992). While some learners may be merely in the classroom in order to fulfill a language requirement, many of these learners nevertheless expect to reach a level of proficiency that will help them use the language in everyday encounters while traveling to countries where the target language is spoken. This pragmatic skill set can best be further developed through a highly interactive, communicative approach that is typical in beginning language learning environments.

The language program is committed to serving students who are primarily driven by an instrumental motivation. This pragmatic skill set can best be further developed through a highly interactive, communicative approach that is typical in beginning language learning environments.

The second group includes undergraduate learners who do intend to continue with the language after the completion of the foreign language requirement. These students need to expand their abilities beyond a purely instrumental skill set. In addition to communicative language competencies, these learners need to start developing critical literacy competencies that will enable them to succeed in the upper-level curriculum, which consists of classes whose emphasis is primarily on cultural and literary studies. These students have to begin using language not only as an instrument, but also as an analytical and cognitive tool.

The third group we serve comprises those undergraduate students who have not decided if they intend to continue with the language after the completion of the foreign language requirement. Our goal is to attract undecided students into the upper-level undergraduate program by the selection of compelling content and a pedagogy that convinces learners of the learnability of literary and cultural analysis in the second language. Ideally, learners discover that it is not only possible but also intellectually highly stimulating to develop language skills through the analysis of texts and cultural artifacts.

These three varying objectives and motivations should be integrated in a culture-centered and communication-oriented curriculum, which is based on the following three pedagogical principles.

**Pedagogical Principle I: Advanced-level L2 Literacy is Teachable and Learnable**

Many language programs do not explicitly set a foundation for the development of advanced reading and writing skills at the lower level of the curriculum. Beginning textbooks of modern languages tend to devote very little room for the
explicit training of critical L2 reading. These editorial decisions lead practitioners to intuitively assume that literacy skills transfer automatically from the native language into the target language, once the learner has achieved a certain level of linguistic proficiency. This transfer hypothesis, proposed by Cummins (1985), was debunked in the 1990s by Bernhardt and Kamil (1995). Their findings led to the development of the interactive-compensatory model of second language reading (Bernhardt, 2000, 2005, 2011). The model suggests that reading skills do not transfer automatically and effortlessly from the first language into the target language.

Second language reading instruction that focuses on the acquisition of learner strategies can facilitate the transfer process of literary reading skills (Urlaub, 2008). To this end the lead author designed a website (http://wikis.la.utexas.edu/rcst/) that teaches learners how to raise critical questions during their interaction with literary and cultural materials in the target language. The fact that in this environment the students learn how to generate questions inverts traditional classroom interactional patterns and thus contributes to the learners’ self-reliance. More importantly, Rosenshine, Meister and Chapman (1996), the National Reading Panel (2000), and Taboada and Guthrie (2006) identified the self-generation of questions in a large variety of educational contexts as a highly effective strategy to help readers critically comprehend written discourse. Specifically, the website designed for this course teaches students to generate four different kinds of questions to analyze literary texts: (1) basic content questions, (2) interpretative questions, (3) intercultural questions, and (4) global questions. The training also teaches learners to use their own questions to organize a critical response essay to literary texts. Throughout the semester, students refine this reading technique by submitting and discussion their questions on the course’s online discussion board. Urlaub (2008) has assessed this approach to teaching literary reading in the second language in an experimental setting, and concludes that intermediate-level language learners benefit from explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies. They produce more sophisticated reactions to cultural content presented in the target language compared to learners who do not receive instruction in this particular reading strategy.

**Pedagogical Principle II: Skill-Oriented Approach to Cultural Analysis**

In spite of the recommendations about teaching culture expressed by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (2006), many textbook publishers still design their materials based on the notion that teaching culture is merely the transfer of factual data. Using culture in language classes therefore means for many instructors to simply select, present, and contextualize cultural artifacts that the learner can appreciate with limited linguistic competences and background knowledge. Instructors may teach culture, but they often fail to teach cultural analysis (Galloway, 1998).

In order to teach learners to independently approach cultural artifacts critically, teaching culture must not be solely regarded in terms of appreciation or knowledge of objects, but as the development of an analytical skill. In order to achieve a desired level of interaction, critical cultural analysis — like critical reading — can be taught by means of instruction in the use of strategies. Urlaub (2008) suggests that the strategy-based approach to literary reading described above can also help learn-
ers produce more sophisticated reactions to discourse systems other than literature, such as film, visual arts, and music. Therefore, the new course also used the strategy-based approach described above when learners were asked to interact with these art forms.

Pedagogical Principle III: Effective Use of Instructional Time

The time that learners spend on-task must be managed carefully to help college students learn effectively in intensified, accelerated language learning environments. As a result of the limited amount of classroom space available due to the rapidly-growing undergraduate student body at the University of Texas at Austin, the new six-credit second-year class in German needed to be scheduled as three 100-minute meetings per week. Initially, we considered this situation as a challenge, because we had accepted the frequently repeated “fact” that adult learners have a maximum attention span of twenty minutes. Interestingly, there is no research that clearly establishes the length of the attention span for adult language learners. Nevertheless, we concluded that a 100-minute session, even if the instructor schedules a break, could not be organized on the basis of a “warm up/three activities/cool down” pattern typical for beginning and early intermediate language instruction. Therefore, early in the planning stages we decided that the teaching methodology must take the realities of scheduling into consideration. The first half of each lesson, we decided, should be fully dedicated to the development and refinement of linguistic competencies in the form of meaningful grammar activities and the expansion of the learner's vocabulary in a highly contextualized environment. The second half would allow students, mostly through a general deceleration and longer group-work sequences, to apply and solidify newly-acquired linguistic skills in a culture-centered, literacy-oriented environment.

Planning

Fall 2009

The planning of the curricular reform began in the fall semester of 2009. As a first step, we adopted — still in the context of the old curricular structure — a new textbook entitled Stationen (Augustyn & Euba 2008). The response was positive among learners, in particular in regard to the textbook’s selection and presentation of socio-geographical content. Instructors also liked to work with Stationen, because its modular organization made it relatively easy to add or subtract elements.

Spring 2010

In the spring of 2010, we received a professional development grant from the Texas Language Center that funded our course development activities. We used the spring semester to reacquaint ourselves with the research literature on recent curricular reforms in language programs, most notably the reforms undertaken at Stanford (Bernhardt & Berman, 1999) and at Georgetown (Byrnes & Kord, 2002), as well as publications that theorized and promoted systematic approaches to literacy development in foreign language departments (Maxim, 2006; Swaffar & Arens, 2005).

As Byrnes and Kord (2002) imply, a curricular reform requires the support of the entire department. Lower- and upper-level instruction must be tightly inte-
In order to get a better understanding of the entire undergraduate program, we visited those upper-level courses that most prospective majors and minors take immediately after they have completed the language requirement. Countless conversations with colleagues who teach upper-division courses in the department have refined our understanding of a second-year curriculum that we hoped would prepare and inspire language students at that level for upper-level work.

We continued to hold regular meetings throughout the summer to select cultural materials and literary texts. We also carefully analyzed the textbook and decided to concentrate only on those modules and activities that clearly supported the course's educational goals. A few days before the first day of instruction, we introduced our course to the teaching staff who had been appointed to teach the accelerated second-year course. All four instructors were experienced graduate-level instructors with research emphases in German literature, cultural studies, and theoretical linguistics. We discussed the underlying principles and encouraged the group not only to make suggestions in terms of the cultural content, but also to further refine the conceptual framework that guided both our initial decisions and the teaching approach we had developed.

In addition, a few administrative processes needed to be completed. The language program director had to harmonize the new curriculum with the existing placement procedure, which at the University of Texas is conducted by a unit outside individual departments. Moreover, academic advisors outside the department had to be briefed about the new curricular structure, because it changed the pathway toward the fulfillment of the language requirement as well as the undergraduate minor or major.

**Implementation**

**Fall 2010**

We phased in the new curriculum by offering three sections of the new course with a total enrollment of 73 students. During coordination meetings the instructors supported each other in the transition toward the revised learning goals and pedagogical principles. The instructors also collectively participated in the selection of reading materials and the design of activities. In addition, we had the opportunity to share the new curriculum at a variety of professional events with colleagues from different departments at the University of Texas as well as with colleagues at the high school and community college levels. The input of colleagues from inside and outside our institution was helpful in shaping our approach and provided us with rich feedback and helped us to adjust the curriculum.

**Spring 2011**

The experiences from the fall provided us with three insights. First, the course was successful overall. Performance on newly-designed exams and guided essays indicated that students left the course with a skill set that prepared them specifically for the demands of the department's upper-level curriculum. At the same time, more students moved on beyond the language requirement and enrolled in upper-division courses. Second, although the instructors were satisfied with the new course goals,
teaching the course required, an exceptional commitment to teamwork and collaboration in addition to strong teaching skills. The instructors’ feedback indicated that more specific pre-semester training was necessary. Third, we felt that there was too much content at the expense of substance. The class moved from one topic to the next in a hectic way. Therefore, we decided simply to skip one more chapter in the textbook and invest the resulting time in activities that intensified the learning and processing of a smaller volume of material. Over the winter, we made the necessary changes in the syllabus and course calendar.

From the Classroom

In this section we share concrete classroom perspectives that relate to two issues: the selection of a textbook and the creation of supplemental materials; and the research-based approach to teaching literary reading in the second language developed by the lead author.

Teaching Materials & Supplemental Materials

Stationen (Augustyn & Euba, 2008) served several functions for the course. First of all, the second-year German textbook provided the kind of communicative activities that are relevant both for students with a desire to leave the program after the fulfillment of the language requirement and those who intend to continue in the upper-level curriculum on the department. On the content side, the textbook has an emphasis on socio-geographic issues pertaining to Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. This content proved to be relevant for the majority of students. Students with a more instrumental motive for language study could relate to the idea of future travel experiences. Students who were more attracted to the cultures of the German-speaking countries could extract information that satisfied their interest. However, we were less impressed with the selection of longer texts made by the authors of Stationen, and we decided to replace these pages with other supplemental readings and activities. Although we certainly realize that there is no perfect textbook, our classroom experiences and our students’ feedback confirmed our expectations that Stationen is an adequate textbook for the accelerated and intensified second year of German language instruction at the University of Texas at Austin.

We mainly relied on four kinds of materials and procedures to supplement the commercial textbook: interactive PowerPoint presentations; a parliamentary debate format; web-quests based on the websites of German alternative weeklies; and the Steckbrief (portrait) format. We describe these materials and procedures below.

The introductory PowerPoint presentations, eight slides each, present the main cultural topics of the particular city treated in the chapter and thus provide a schema for the students to ease them into the topic during the first session of each new chapter. All presentations have the same basic structure. The slides are of increasing intellectual complexity. The presentation opens with visual input combined with open-ended questions in order to trigger discussion, critical reflection, and communicative group work activities. After providing opportunities to analyze famous quotations about the particular city, each presentation ends with the introduction of phrases that might be used in a discussion that is thematically connected to the chapter. We consciously designed presentations that consistently prompt the kind of
communicative activities that provide learners with opportunities to interact with each other.

The communicative skills introduced and practiced through the PowerPoint presentation were reiterated throughout the chapter and took an important role in a discussion format that we designed to conclude each chapter: the parliamentary debate. This format provides a context for an advanced and in-depth discussion of socio-political topics. Students grouped themselves according to political party affiliation, so the classroom became a small version of the German parliament, the Bundestag. The instructor took the role of the Speaker of the parliament. Students had to work in their parties on statements and questions regarding cultural topics, such as “Should Germans be proud of their country?” or “Should there be another Love Parade in Berlin?” The focused group activity phase learners presented and questioned these statements in the simulated plenary.

In addition to these two formats, we designed web-quests that provided students with task-based activities to interact with the websites of German alternative weeklies, such as Hamburg’s Oxmox (www.oxmoxhh.de) or Berlin’s Zitty (www.zitty.de). Students had to peruse the website in order to find the answers to questions eliciting very specific information, such as what band would play in a specific venue in Munich that night, or what plays were being shown on Berlin’s theater stages during the upcoming weekend.

The Steckbrief (portrait) format represents another tool that we designed in order to help students navigate through difficult authentic materials. In this activity, students learn to extract specific biographical information from expository texts that describe celebrities who come from the particular German city under discussion. A worksheet provided students with an advanced organizer. These exercises encouraged students to generate questions they might ask the famous person in an interview. The exercises helped students develop the same kind of reading comprehension strategies they had learned to apply to the longer readings.

Approach to Teaching Literary Reading in the Second Language

We decided to replace all the textbook materials for sustained reading with supplementary readings. This decision was based on our experiences with Stationen in the previous year. The main disadvantage of Stationen’s text selection and activities was that they did not help our students develop the literary reading skills required for success in our upper-level curriculum.

We decided to implement an approach to teaching literary reading in the second language based on instruction in reading comprehension strategies. At the beginning of the semester, the learners completed the reading comprehension strategy training described above on the website specifically designed to support the new German curriculum (http://wikis.la.utexas.edu/rcst/).

Since the upper-level German curriculum at the University of Texas at Austin has an emphasis on literary and cultural studies, the texts that we selected and the activities we designed needed to fulfill several functions. These texts needed be compatible with the strategies taught for literary reading. We also decided that in our particular departmental purposes the texts should be part of the literary canon so that learners will enter the upper-level German curriculum with high self-efficacy.
Based on their positive experience with literary discourse in the target language. Finally, the texts should provide a thematic connection to the topic and city discussed in Stationen. As a result, we selected the following three texts: A fictional letter from Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks Verfall einer Familie (1901/1989); Wolfgang Borchert's Die drei dunklen Könige (1946/2007); and Heinrich Böll's Ankedote zur Senkung der Arbeitsmoral (1963/2006). With this decision, we arrived at an effective course package that aptly emphasized the cultural literacy ambitions of our curriculum redesign.

Limitations

The article offers a limited view of our process, in that it is a descriptive study and does not include quantitative data that empirically demonstrates that the actual learning outcomes of the new curriculum are similar or superior to those of the previous model. Systematic benchmark data did not exist. Moreover, it was the intention of the curriculum reform to change learning goals and to supplement a language proficiency-oriented approach with instruction towards the development of a literacy-oriented skill set. Due to this substantial change in content and learning objectives between the old and the new curriculum, measurements taken before and after the change could not accurately indicate an improvement. For example, if one had chosen a proficiency-oriented assessment tool like the ACTFL scales and procedures to measure oral and/or writing proficiency, this instrument would not have fully represented the broader skill set that the new curriculum fosters. Therefore, the lack of benchmark data and substantial changes meant that our indication for student learning relies exclusively on unsystematic data: the learner’s performance on tests and essays, their feedback at the end of the semester, and the comments of their instructors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Developments that lead to curricular reform in language programs are often perceived as negative events. This was not different at the University of Texas, where a budgetary reallocation process led the administration to promote the development of intensified and accelerated curricula in individual language departments. Not all stakeholders welcomed this development. In the context of the reform described in this article, however, this seemingly negative situation became a positive catalyst that inspired the department to re-conceptualize curricular structures and pedagogical parameters. The reform we undertook toward an intensified curriculum that more explicitly fosters cultural literacy would not have been implemented so quickly without the input received from the administration and the support of the Texas Language Center.

Reforming the second-year German language curriculum at the University of Texas has not only served the interests of the department and the undergraduate students, it has also provided an opportunity for professional development among graduate instructors. Collaboration with the language program director during the planning and implementation phases has provided graduate instructors with an understanding of the pedagogical and administrative procedures that accompany curriculum reform. These insights are extremely valuable when graduate students apply
for junior faculty positions. Therefore, we strongly recommend working closely with graduate students in these processes. Graduate instructors at many institutions carry the bulk of the language teaching load, and therefore are very sensitive to what is best for undergraduate students. Appropriate participation in curricular development serves as a great opportunity to familiarize future professors with the pragmatic aspects of their prospective job.

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References


The Academic Experiences of Native Spanish Speakers in the Traditional Spanish Classroom

Lealane Sanders  
Ware County High School, GA

David Alley  
Georgia Southern University

Abstract

This study examines the academic experiences of heritage Spanish-speakers who were placed in a traditional Spanish class for non-Spanish speakers at the secondary level. Each of the participants in the study demonstrated advanced-levels of oral proficiency in Spanish yet each was placed in a beginning-level Spanish class. An ethnographic case study method was used to explore the effect of this inappropriate placement on the students' linguistic abilities and academic identities. This study addresses an all-too-common practice that fails to advance heritage language students' knowledge of their native language. The needs of these students differ from those of non-native speakers, and the type of class that they take should reflect this.

Introduction

Between 1990 and 2006 the number of Hispanic students enrolled in American public schools nearly doubled. Of the 49.4 million students enrolled in K-12 public education in 2011, one-in-five is Hispanic (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). In 1990, that number was one-in-eight. The percentage of Hispanic students will continue to grow in the decades ahead. According to Fry and Gonzales (2008), the Hispanic school-age population will grow by 166% by the year 2050 while the non-Hispanic school-age population will grow by only 4%. If this trend continues, in fewer than 40 years, Hispanic children will constitute the majority of public school students.

At present, Hispanic students represent 20% of the public school population nationwide (Del Valle, 2008). Within the broad classification of Hispanic, the cultural background and linguistic abilities of students vary greatly. This study focuses on students who acquired Spanish as their first language and who live in homes where Spanish is the primary spoken language. Students who meet these requirements are often referred to by the terms residual speakers, bilingual speakers, home-background speakers, native Spanish speakers or heritage Spanish speakers. Because Spanish is the first language of this group, it is not uncommon for these students to demonstrate limited proficiency in English. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2012) defines limited English-proficient children (LEP) as national origin-minority group children whose inability to speak and understand
the English language excludes them from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district. Another term that is often associated with LEP students is heritage language speaker. Heritage language students are those who have been “raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speak or at least understand the language, and who are, to some degree, bilingual in that language and in English” (Valdés, 2001, p. 38).

While not all Hispanic students arrive at school with a limited English proficiency, those that do present a significant challenge for their teachers and for the school system. This is partially due to federal laws mandating that every school district take affirmative steps to accommodate these children and rectify their language deficiency. A handful of states such as California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, where traditionally the percentage of Hispanic students approaches or exceeds 50%, offer a wide variety of special services to help children overcome language deficiencies including bilingual education, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs, community-based English tutoring, and two-way immersion programs. Many of these programs are funded under Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act (Fry & Gonzales, 2008).

Increases in the population of Hispanic students in public schools in non-traditional states have also been significant. For example, from 1994-2004 the number of Hispanic students increased fourfold from 1.8% to 7.7% of Georgia’s public school population. Although this accelerated rate of growth has slowed somewhat in the last eight years, Hispanic children currently represent 12% of Georgia’s school population (Eads, Algarin, Afolabi, Stephens, & Nweke, n.d.). According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2010) there are 88,755 LEP students enrolled in Georgia schools. This figure represents an increase of 43.8% since 2004. Although concentrated in the metro Atlanta area, school systems around the state have seen increases in their Hispanic student population. For example, in Murray County and Colquitt County, school districts, that have less than 10,000 students, almost 15% of the population is Hispanic. Two other medium-sized systems, Dalton City and Gainesville City report over 50% Hispanic student population (Eads et al., n.d.).

Despite the increases in population, the offering of appropriate services for LEP children has not kept pace with demand. Many factors such as inexperience, absence of an ESOL specialist, and lack of resources, have forced smaller school systems around the nation to look for alternatives in how they educate these students (Valencia, Menchaca, & Donato, 2002). One such strategy is placing heritage language learners in mainstream Spanish I and Spanish II classes. A rationale for placing Spanish-speaking LEP students in beginning-level Spanish classes can be that such classes will help raise the students’ grade point average and provide them with success experiences since many heritage Spanish language learners struggle with regular academic classes. This study considers how this practice in a small school system in Georgia affected the linguistic abilities and academic identities of four heritage Spanish language learners.

Review of the Literature

During the last two decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of heritage learners of Spanish in traditional high school Spanish classes (Tal-
Some of these students take Spanish class because it is a prerequisite for college admission. Others choose to study Spanish because they feel that the class will be an easy A for them and will help bring up their grade point average (Jessen, 2008). Some heritage learners do not choose to take a Spanish class, but rather are placed by a school counselor in the hopes that the class will supplement or replace ESOL services. Finally, heritage learners of Spanish are sometimes placed in beginning Spanish classes for the purpose of learning to speak a standard variety of Spanish as opposed to the regional dialect that they were taught at home (Valdés, 2001).

A survey conducted by the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese found that heritage learners in the classrooms were a major concern of the organization’s members (Tesser, 2000, p. 14). One of the causes of this concern is that within the parameters of the heritage learner label there are many levels of native language fluency. Valdés (2001) noted that not only are there many different dialects and varieties of Spanish, but it is often the case that the standard Spanish is not the Spanish vernacular used in the heritage students’ communities. Moreover, many Hispanic students who come from Spanish-speaking homes have been educated in the United States in English-only classrooms. As a result, “[students] may or may not be able to speak the heritage language, and their literacy skills in the language are usually limited” (Wang & Green, 2001, p. 173). Traditional Spanish language classrooms are not designed to meet the spectrum of the needs of the heritage learner, and the misplacement of these students often creates frustrations for both the student and the teacher.

For native speakers who do not come from a background where the standard dialect is used and who have never had any formal instruction in their native language, gaps between formal and informal registers of the language can soon appear. Reagan and Osborn (2002) state that “it is not uncommon for native speakers of Spanish, for instance, to have difficulties in basic Spanish foreign language classes, largely because of the differences between the normative language employed in the classroom and the language variety of the native speaker” (p. 9). In addition, heritage language learners may be able to communicate easily when speaking informally, but may have problems using a formal academic register. (Hanson-Rautiainen, 2007; Tallon, 2009; Whys, 2006). Lack of background knowledge in the native language (Spanish) can also affect students’ academic performance in their second language (English). Hanson-Rautiainen (2007) observes that “many [heritage learners] quickly learn basic English, but they never acquire the fundamentals they will need to pursue education beyond high school. At the same time, they lack a strong background in Spanish language literacy. Because they have yet to master either language, everyday academic performance is an ongoing struggle” (p. 9). Whys (2006) echoes this idea by stating, “…many [heritage learners] reach a plateau at a certain point in their English studies because they do not have a firm foundation in grammar in their first language” (p. 4).

Another area of potential conflict between Spanish teachers and heritage learners in a foreign language classroom is that of expectations of the performance and role of heritage speakers in the classroom. In a study of teaching assistants who were instructing native speakers in Spanish classes at the college level, Potowski (2001) found that the teaching assistants exhibited behaviors that made heritage learners feel uncomfortable in the class. These behaviors included “holding unreasonable ex-
expectations for [heritage learner] knowledge of the Spanish language and expecting greater classroom participation” (Potowski, 2001, p. 4–5). Many Spanish teachers are unsure of what to do with native speakers in the classroom. For some, the solution is to have them serve as models or assistant teachers. The problem with this strategy, however, is that the expectation imposed on the heritage learner is often too high. In order to instruct others, heritage speakers must possess pedagogical knowledge of the structure of the language and have the skills necessary to explain it to others (Potowski, 2001). Not all heritage language learners possess these qualities and placing them into an authoritative position causes unnecessary stress on them. Being faced with these higher expectations may cause heritage language learners to withdraw or show only minimal participation in the Spanish class.

Based on the manifold issues raised here, the research questions that guide this study are:

1. How do heritage Spanish language learners negotiate the Spanish and English speaking worlds in which they live?
2. How has the heritage Spanish language learners’ enrollment in traditional Spanish I or Spanish II classes impacted their language abilities?
3. What is the relationship between heritage Spanish language learners and their classmates in the traditional Spanish class?

Methods

The researchers used critical ethnography and ethnographic case study method. Critical ethnography is a form of qualitative research which, like other forms of qualitative research, seeks to “contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 4). The case study method provides a framework for gathering, sorting, and analyzing data. The strength of case study is that it focuses on specific situations to “define research topics broadly and not narrowly, cover contextual or complex multivariate conditions and not just isolated variables, and rely on multiple and not singular sources of evidence” (Yin, 2003, xi).

Setting

The research was conducted at a magnet school located in rural, southeast Georgia. The research site was a small, K–12 school that has a curriculum focused on agriculture, math, and science. Students were chosen by a lottery system to attend the school. In the school, there was one classroom per grade for students in kindergarten through fifth. In the middle and the high school (grades 6–12), there were two classrooms per grade. The graduating senior class of 2008 consisted of 43 students (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). The school was the only one in the county system that was not a Title I school, and it consistently exceeded the state average on standardized test scores. The graduation rate was 100%. Enrollment for the 2007-2008 school year was 486 students (K–12) with the following ethnic composition: White (69%), Black (19%), Hispanic (5%), Asian (4%), Native American (2%), and Multiracial (1%) (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). Due to budget limitations, the school was closed in 2010.
Participants

Our heritage language learners ages 15–17 who were enrolled in traditional Spanish I or Spanish II classes at the research site volunteered for this study. They are identified by the following pseudonyms Sara, Diana, Juan, and Rosa. Each student was of Hispanic descent and indicated that Spanish was the principal language spoken at home, and none of these students were being served in an ESOL program. In addition, each student was in grade 10 or 11 and all of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The students in this study did not have the choice of “opting out” of the Spanish class. Due to the small size of the school, there was no other class in which students could be placed. Therefore all students at the research site, including research participants, were required to take Spanish as a foreign language. Qualitative data were gathered from student interviews, student reflective journals, and teacher/researcher reflective journals.

Researcher’s Role and Reflection Journal

The lead researcher’s role in this project was that of a participant, observer, and activist. She taught the language classes in which the participants were enrolled and interacted with the participants every school day As a result she was unable to adopt a completely detached, clinical attitude. In order to make explicit and monitor her feelings the researcher kept a daily journal documenting what transpired during Spanish I and II classes each day for a period of 10 weeks (roughly one grading period). Information recorded by the researcher also consisted of observations, feelings, details of lessons, and discipline issues that arose. The researcher’s observations were triangulated with the other data obtained from interviews and student journal entries.

Student Interviews

Participants were interviewed at three points (beginning, middle, end) over a period of 10 weeks (roughly one grading period). Interviews were conducted individually and in groups before school, after school, or during homeroom. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the first author. After transcription, participants had the opportunity to read back over their interviews in order to guarantee accuracy. Interview questions were open-ended, which left room for additional questioning, thus providing for a semi-structured interview format.

Participant Reflective Journals

Students completed a daily journal entry for a period of 10 weeks. Each day, students summarized what they did in their Spanish class that day and recorded their feelings about what happened in the class. Students were also asked to include information about how they were feeling about education/school in general each day. Students were given time to do this at the end of their Spanish class. Journals were collected daily and kept in a locked storage cabinet.

Teacher/Researcher Reflective Journal

The first author kept a daily journal documenting what transpired during the students’ Spanish I and II classes each day for the same 10 weeks. Information recorded by the teacher consisted of (1) the degree to which the heritage learner engaged in the day’s activities, (2) heritage learners’ perceived interest in class activities, (3) the
degree of success with which the heritage learner completed the day’s tasks, (4) interaction between the heritage learner and traditional learners in the class, and (5) interaction between the heritage learner and teacher/researcher. The teacher/researcher evaluated each of these components using a scale of High, Medium, and Low. Student completion of homework and in-class assignments as well as grades on quizzes and tests provided additional information which was used to determine degrees of success on particular activities (component # 3).

Findings

Many topics were discussed during the student interviews and written about in the student and teacher reflective journals. When sorting the data, the interview transcripts / journal entries were read and highlighted as themes emerged. Next, the researchers went through to find commonalities and coded those as well. As the data were analyzed, common themes begin to emerge. These findings fall under the umbrella of the three stated research topics: (1) how the participants negotiate the Spanish and English speaking worlds in which they live, (2) how the participants’ enrollment in traditional Spanish I or Spanish II classes impacted their language abilities, and (3) the relationship between and participants and their classmates in the traditional Spanish class. The results are presented by topic.

Negotiation of Spanish and English Speaking Worlds

Based on the information gathered in the interviews and student journals, all of the participants felt uncomfortably caught between their English and Spanish-speaking worlds. At home and in many public places such as church, there was pressure to speak Spanish with parents and older adults although all of the participants strongly preferred to speak English. The participants gave many examples of how they expressed this preference for English in their daily lives. For example, all of the participants reported using English exclusively with their siblings and peers. Several of the participants said that they usually answered a question that was posed in Spanish by first using English and only using Spanish as a last resort. Participants also mixed Spanish and English frequently, a process referred to as code switching. However, such language mixing was generally discouraged by the adults who interacted with these children. For example, Diana first attended school in Belize where she had studied Kriol, a Belizean English-based Creole language. Diana recalled that students were not allowed to speak Spanish at the school in Belize. If a student did speak Spanish, the teacher would hit his or her hand with a ruler. This practice caused one of her relatives, who only spoke Spanish at the time, to get in to a lot of trouble. As a result, he now refuses to speak Spanish at all even though he understands it.

All of the participants mentioned their lack of proficiency in Spanish as the major reason for defaulting to English in their daily discourse. For example, Sara stated, “See, it’s hard now for me to speak Spanish, like straight, without thinking…like whenever I speak Spanish I don’t like comprehend it until later, until like after, I have to think about what I said.” Several of the study’s participants also mentioned that they tended to avoid people who speak only Spanish. Again Sara summarized this feeling by stating, “And sometimes- that’s why sometimes I just try to avoid them so I don’t have to have any more conversation with them. Cause I don’t want to look
dumb. Like “oh, she's Mexican but she doesn't speak Spanish right.” The generalized fear among the participants was that speaking Spanish poorly could earn them the label of *nopalote en la frente*, a slang expression that is sometimes used to describe a Mexican or Mexican-American who is living in the United States or who frequently visits the United States (Cardona, 2005). While this phrase is often used in a positive manner as a way of stating that someone has strong ties to their heritage, it can also be used in a more derogatory sense. The students in this study used this expression in a negative way to describe a person who is clearly Mexican but who directly or indirectly denies their heritage. All the participants in this study identified *nopalote en la frente* as an unfavorable term and expressed a desire to avoid acquiring this label.

In summary, these four students faced a linguistic dilemma. On the one hand, they felt that English was the language that they spoke the best and they preferred to use it over Spanish. Their Spanish proficiency, they believed, was somewhat lacking. For this reason, they avoided speaking Spanish to older, more linguistically proficient adults. However, avoiding Spanish altogether was also problematic because they feared the label of *nopalote en la frente*.

**Impact on Participants’ Linguistic Abilities when Enrolled in Traditional Spanish Classes**

Participants in this study were placed in a beginning-level Spanish class despite the fact that Spanish was the primary language spoken in their homes. All of these students were keenly aware of their deficiencies in Spanish, yet data from their journals and interviews reveal that the traditional Spanish classes in which they were enrolled were not meeting their needs. Many of the journal entries show that the students were bored by the material being presented in the classroom. Sara’s journal entries, for example, clearly indicate that she would rather be reading novels in English than participating in class activities. Rosa also expresses frustration at the slow pace of the class. She states that going over the tests and quizzes is unhelpful because she always makes As, so the review is hardly necessary.

Although the study participants expressed frustration at having to move slowly through the work, they did not express a desire to leave the class. Rosa, for example, found some benefit in the Spanish I class in which she was enrolled. When Rosa was a child, her mother spent some time teaching her the basics of Spanish such as the alphabet and how to read and write. These lessons with her mother were the only instruction that she had ever received until she entered her Spanish I class. Although Spanish was her first language, she recognized that she needed further education. This recognition was a common theme throughout her interviews and her journal entries. One journal entry reads, “…[the lesson] was all beneficial. Even if I already know how to speak Spanish, I’ve never really had the proper teachings.” One area in which Rosa felt she needed help was speaking Spanish formally. She described how she and her siblings tended to mix English and Spanish together when communicating. Part of the Spanglish mix was using English pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar rules when speaking Spanish. She states, “There’s these words that we just don’t pronounce right. It’s pretty funny. But my mom understands. My mom’s like, ‘if y’all go to Mexico they are not going to understand what y’all are saying.”

Diana also recognized her need for instruction in the Spanish language, specifically in the area of vocabulary. She explains, “To me, I would like to learn Spanish,
but I want to learn harder stuff. You know—like stuff I don't know.” When asked to give an example of a hard word, Diana explained that she would like to have words presented to her in her Spanish class that were at the level of the vocabulary words presented to her in her English class. Her reason for wanting to know these types of words is that she felt lost sometimes when she hears adults talking because she does not know all of the words that they are saying. She admitted that she often asked her parents and other adults to rephrase the sentence or give her another word for something. Although she eventually learned the meaning of the word that she did not understand, she did not like being put in the position of feeling confused. While Diana's journal entries frequently identified vocabulary exercises as being beneficial, they also showed Diana's frustration at having to move slowly through the work. Many of the vocabulary words taught in the traditional Spanish class were part of her vernacular.

Unlike other participants, Juan believed he was proficient in Spanish and did not need any additional instruction in the language. He explained his enrollment in the class by stating, “I mean, I didn't have a choice. They put me in here. You know, they say you got to have this class to graduate.” Juan stated that he probably would have chosen to take the class anyway because it was an easy A, and it was like a free period for him. Juan thought most of the activities in the traditional Spanish classroom were easy. However, he found activities from a text especially designed for heritage language learners to be too difficult. He mentioned his dislike for this book which he referred to as the book of torture.

A review of student journals and interviews reveals several commonalities. Three of the four study participants feel that they need instruction in the Spanish language. These students also express a desire to have this instruction available to them. All of the students agree that the rigor of the work in their beginning-level Spanish classes is lacking in relation to their abilities.

Relationship Between Participants and their Classmates

The prior knowledge of Spanish that the study participants brought into the classroom set them apart from their peers. They recognized that they were different, and they also noted that their classmates thought of them as being different. It was not uncommon for study participants to be placed in a leadership position by their peers or by the teacher because of their background knowledge; they spoke at length about their role as a leader in the classroom. Each student reported that being seen as a leader by their peers made them feel good about themselves. Diana stated that “[The non-Spanish speaking students] put us on a pedestal.” For Diana, the role of a leader was not one that she necessarily wanted. Yet, her classmates frequently asked her for help both inside and outside of the classroom, and so she often found herself in a leadership position. She mentioned several times throughout her interviews and journals that she disliked group and partner work, especially when she was paired up with anyone other than Sara. On multiple occasions, she revealed that she did not have the patience to work with other students because many of the other students were so far below her level that it annoyed her to have to work with them. All of the study participants mentioned in their interviews and journal logs that other students in the class wanted to partner up or work with the heritage language learn-
ers. According to Sara, for example, “here in our class when someone needs to know something, they’ll automatically turn to either me or Diana.”

While Diana had a strong negative reaction to group work, the others did not seem to mind the attention so much. In fact, some actually considered being in a position to help their classmates a positive thing and something that they enjoyed doing. Rosa stated that being able to help others made her feel needed by her classmates, and she enjoyed being in a position to offer help to them. In fact, helping others in the classroom actually seemed to boost the self-esteem of the heritage language learners. When asked in the group interview to discuss things that occurred in the Spanish class that made them feel good about themselves as students, three of the study participants agreed that they felt good about themselves when they were able to help others in the class. All of the participants described how being seen as a leader by their classmates improved their image of themselves as students, thereby affecting their academic identity. Furthermore, three of the four students admitted that they enjoyed acting in the leadership role within the class.

Although the students generally recognized their position as a positive one, they all mentioned that there was one very large downside to being viewed as a leader. This downside occurred when they made an error in class. Even though each study participant maintained an A average in their Spanish class, they did not have perfect grades. As a matter of fact, only one of them had the highest grade in his or her Spanish class. While the students did not mind not having a 100 average, their classmates’ reactions to any grade of less than a 100 did bother them. All of the study participants recounted experiences of feeling dumb in the classroom whenever they missed a question or did not make a 100 on an assignment. This dumb feeling did not stem from the incident itself but rather from their classmates’ reaction to them missing a question. For the heritage language students, the downside of being seen as the expert is that their classmates often put too high of an expectation on them. The expectation was so high that any grade that was less than perfect could make these students feel inadequate. Sara recalled a time when she made an eighty-something on a quiz. The boy next to her had made higher, and bragged loudly to the class that he spoke Spanish better than the Mexican. Sara stated that this type of situation irritated her because she knew that her knowledge of Spanish was superior to the student who was bragging. Juan also stated in his interview that when he had a grade of less than a 100, he heard such things such as “You have a 94? How do you have a 94 in Spanish? You’re supposed to have a 100.” All of the students reported that they were pressured to have good grades by their peers and made to feel dumb if they made lower grades than their classmates. This experience motivated them in different ways. Two of the study participants, Diana and Rosa, stated that feeling dumb made them want to work harder on the material in class so that the situation would not happen again in the future.
Discussion

This case study focused on the experiences of four heritage language learners enrolled in traditional Spanish classes in high school. It is clear that the linguistic and cultural background of heritage language Spanish speakers sets them apart from their non-Spanish speaking classmates. Because of this, instruction in the heritage language should be different for these students than for their non-Spanish speaking peers.

This study draws attention to the issues that heritage speakers of Spanish face in trying to negotiate their Spanish-speaking home and English-speaking school environments. Study participants recognized a need to improve their knowledge of their first language, Spanish. This need derived from a desire to communicate with proficient Spanish speakers and a fear of being labeled as someone who repudiated their Hispanic heritage. This finding is in accordance to research by Tallon (2006) who found that “not only do heritage students fear that the native speakers will catch all their errors, they also feel that they will be judged by them” (p. 152). In this study, students felt like they were being judged not only as an individual but also as a member of the larger Hispanic culture based on their language fluency. For this reason, study participants made a habit of avoiding the use of Spanish with more fluent speakers.

While the study participants reported being hesitant to speak Spanish outside of the school setting, within the Spanish classroom they spoke without reservation. This confidence to speak stemmed from the positive feedback that they received from their monolingual classmates. It is incumbent on Spanish teachers to provide further positive feedback that would encourage heritage language students to maintain rather than abandon their heritage language. Although a class for non-native speakers is an inappropriate placement for a heritage learner, a skillful and compassionate teacher can help such a student understand the value of being bilingual and the role one’s heritage plays in their identity. Within the classroom setting, the heritage language students can act as expert informants. Although the participants in this study did experience great popularity, especially when time to work in pairs, this popularity did little to improve their knowledge of the Spanish language.

Even though the need is there, the traditional Spanish class generally fails to provide adequate compensatory services for heritage language students despite the best intentions of the school. All of the students in this study declared a desire to improve their Spanish language skills. Despite their motivation, the students did not believe that they made any significant language improvements while enrolled in their traditional Spanish I or Spanish II classes. Wang and Green (2001) state that the strategies employed in traditional Spanish classes “ignore a host of linguistic characteristics, sociopsychological factors, and verbal strategies, such as codeswitching, that are typical of individuals who speak more than one language” (p. 171). Instead of adding to the skills that the heritage language students have, the traditional foreign language classroom takes away from potential educational opportunities.

As the population of Hispanics grows, the number of heritage language learners in schools will increase. There are no clear guidelines governing the heritage language education of Spanish speakers in Georgia. If current policy stands, education of these
students in their home language may go one of four ways: (1) these students may not be enrolled in a Spanish class at all. They may replace this class with another foreign language (such as French), or they may simply receive no foreign language credit. (2) Like participants in this study, future students may find themselves enrolled in a traditional Spanish class. (3) As per Georgia policy (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.) students may exempt Spanish class altogether yet receive credit for it on their transcripts. (4) Students may enroll in a Spanish class for heritage or native speakers. The last option is the one that would be most beneficial to students as it would provide them with an appropriate Spanish class that helps them improve their Spanish language skills. It is apparent that the students in this study needed classes designed to teach them Spanish as a heritage language, not as a foreign language. While classes such as these exist in major metro areas, they are rare in small, rural systems.

With the current reductions in spending on education, the dilemma of heritage language learners is not likely to be a top priority for lawmakers or school administrators. In the absence of special classes for heritage language learners, Spanish teachers will likely shoulder the burden of trying to integrate this steadily growing population into their classes for non-native speakers, a solution that was unsuccessful in this study and likely to be unsuccessful in the future. It is therefore imperative that we as educators advocate an equitable and culturally responsive education for heritage speakers of Spanish.

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of using dictogloss in making students notice and reproduce key vocabulary and highlighted structural features in a college intermediate level Arabic L2 class. Dictogloss is a technique used in second language classes to make students pay attention to the relationship between form and meaning. Students listened to a short text containing the target form(s) read aloud by the instructor. Students were asked to work in small groups/pairs to reconstruct the original text. Data for this study were obtained from individual student notes, group-generated text reconstructions, and post-dictogloss reflections. The results of this classroom-based investigation show a significant gap between individual student notes and the final groups-reconstructed texts in terms of both quantity and quality.

Second language (L2) teachers face the dilemma of how to teach grammar within the communicative language teaching approach while at the same time assuring that learners process or notice key targeted forms. Second language acquisition (SLA) research indicates that the language accuracy of learners in immersion programs on certain forms lags significantly behind their fluency (Swain, 1993). There is heightened discussion in SLA on how to incorporate effectively the teaching of grammar in a communicative approach, i.e., focus on form (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2002; Norris & Ortega, 2000). The challenge in teaching grammar or form in a learner-centered, communicative language teaching approach lies in the (in)ability of learners to notice the targeted form and make the necessary form-meaning connection (Thornbury, 1997). In this study, the targeted form is the imperative verb in Arabic. The form of the imperative verb in Arabic differs from the form of the present tense in terms of prefixes and suffixes. The morphosyntactic difference is illustrated in the example below:

\[ ta-ktub-ee \_na \] you (feminine) are writing (present tense verb)
\[ u-ktub-ee \] write down (you. feminine) (imperative verb)

This study highlights a classroom-based action research project on using dictogloss with an intermediate proficiency, college-level Arabic class. The purpose of the inquiry was to find out if using dictogloss could ensure that learners notice or pay attention to the imperative in the context of learning about food recipes and subsequently be able to produce the target forms in their reconstruction of the original text. In particular, the study compares individual written notes of group members...
with the group’s reconstructed text with regard to the correct production of the imperative verb in Arabic and learners’ ability to comprehend and produce key vocabulary from the original text. This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Among key structural forms and vocabulary, in which domain do individual students demonstrate a greater degree of ‘noticing’ from dictogloss activities?

2. Does working in groups substantially improve performance on both categories above?

3. To what extent does the collectively reconstructed text match the original one with regard to key vocabulary, imperative verbs, and discourse markers?

Literature Review

Dictogloss is an integrative approach that focuses on form and meaning as well as on comprehension and production at the same time (Jacobs, 2003; Vasiljevic, 2010). Because of its design, dictogloss provides learners with goal-oriented tasks suitable for collaborative work in which learners interact with each other while negotiating meaning. While performing a dictogloss task, students collaborate with each other using their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, context, and style to reconstruct a text that has been read to them by their instructor (Swain & Lapkin, 2001; Thornburry, 1997). The essence of a dictogloss activity can be summed in the following steps. First, the teacher reads aloud a pre-selected text at a normal speed during which students individually listen and take notes. Second, students work in pairs or small groups in order to reconstruct the original text. Then, each group shares its reconstructed text with the rest of the class. Finally, the teacher provides feedback to each group or to the class as a whole. It is important to note that dictogloss is different from dictation because it does not require reproducing a text word for word where emphasis would be more focused on discrete items, with limited focus on the global meaning of the whole text (Wajnryb, 1990). In contrast, reconstructing the text in a dictogloss activity depends largely on understanding the text’s message or comprehensive meaning and finding relationships between different parts of the text (Mayo, 2002; Qin, 2008). Another important characteristic of dictogloss that sets it apart from dictation is that text reconstruction requires collaboration between members of the group, giving students opportunity to review previously studied concepts and vocabulary as they engage (together) to clarify meaning beyond their initial interpretations or potential misunderstandings gleaned via the independent aural task.

In order to achieve effective and methodologically sound incorporation of dictogloss in language teaching, the teacher has to keep in mind certain principles (Nabei, 1996). Dictogloss should be preceded by a preview of the target vocabulary and structures. This preview can be in the form of a focused lesson that highlights a specific grammar structure and topical vocabulary. The second tenet is to read the selected text two or three times at a normal speed. During the oral readings, students take notes but are advised not to attempt to write every word they hear. After the teacher finishes the text readings, students work in pairs or small groups to reconstruct the text using their notes and their previous knowledge about the topic. Finally, the teacher should provide feedback to the class by comparing groups’ recon-
structured texts with the original, paying attention to key vocabulary, targeted forms, and discourse markers (where applicable).

Research shows that students talking about language while on task correlated positively with language learning (Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, & Brooks, 2009). In the realm of form, dictogloss provides students with a good environment for hypothesis testing, which is vital for interlanguage development and progress towards L2 target forms (Johnson & Swain, 1997). The dialogue occurring within each group in order to reconstruct the text is intended to improve learners’ accuracy (Swain, 1998). In addition to form improvement, if dictogloss is designed and administered properly, it can be an effective communication-rich activity that requires purposeful oral production and negotiation of meaning in order to reach the goal of text reconstruction. Qin (2008) found that dictogloss improved students’ comprehension as well as written production. Jacobs (2003) praised dictogloss because “[it] embodies sound principles of language teaching which include: learner autonomy, cooperation among learners, curricular integration, focus on meaning, diversity, thinking skills, alternative assessment, and teachers as co-learners” (p. 2). The benefits derived from using dictogloss can be attributed to the fact that it is a learner-centered procedure requiring active learner engagement throughout the various steps of the entire task. Students listen when the text is read to them making them intentionally notice key features of the text. They collaborate with their peers on all aspects related to reconstruction of the text: vocabulary, forms, discourse, and meaning.

It may be argued that other focus-on-form techniques can also produce similar or better results. In a study examining the quality and quantity of group interaction Mayo (2002) compared dictogloss with text reconstruction in which parts of the written text are deleted. The study found that dictogloss procedure produced less focus-on-form episodes during group work. Mayo concluded that “the dictogloss was not so successful in encouraging talk on language-related issues due, perhaps, to the difference in input modality, which led learners to focus on producing a coherent paragraph and not on discussing and reflecting on their language choices” (p. 170). To remedy this shortcoming of students paying less attention to form and more to meaning in dictogloss, Nabei (1996) suggested that learners’ production could benefit more from improved access to input during the preview stage through topic discussion, written activities, and comprehension activities. Nabei also suggested teacher intervention by providing feedback during the reconstruction phase, and not waiting until the final stage. Despite these potential limitations, dictogloss remains nonetheless a relatively easy to plan and easy to administer instructional technique with important benefits.

**Methods**

**Context and Participants**

This study was conducted in the context of an intermediate level Arabic class. The class is considered an upper level (fourth semester and up) course because it is beyond the basic language courses (three semesters) offered at the college where the study took place. Students take this class either because they want to continue studying Arabic to obtain a minor in Arabic or because they are required to do so by their
program of study. For students who are continuing with Arabic studies to obtain a minor, they will have to take four more upper level courses in Arabic to qualify for the minor, and for those enrolled because of their major, this course will be their final Arabic class in the program. The focus of this course was on building proficiency; therefore, the scope of the course was wide, i.e. not limited to one content area. The course covered the first seven units of Alosh (2006): *Ahaln wa Sahlan: Functional Modern Standard Arabic for Intermediate Learners*. There were seventeen students enrolled in this class; eight students, classified as heritage language learners, came from households where Arabic is spoken by at least one parent, and nine students came from backgrounds where no Arabic is used at home, classifying them as non-heritage language learners. Non-heritage learners had an average of 200 hours of classroom Arabic instruction prior to taking this class. This study is based on data collected only from seven non-heritage learners who were grouped together in two separate groups. All names used in this study are pseudonyms.

**Data Collection and Procedures**

There were three data sources for this study. The primary sources were individual student notes prepared during the reading stage, and group text reconstruction. Although individual notes did not result in a text, they were an important source of data because they show how students interpreted the text. In contrast, group reconstructions show a final and complete product derived from individual notes and negotiation of meaning within each group. The third data source was a post-activity group reflection in which students in each group described how they reconstructed the text.

The dictogloss procedure was administered after covering a unit on Syrian foods where the imperative verb is used extensively. The dictogloss text was an adaptation of the main passage from the same unit (shown below). The text was read aloud three times at a normal speed by the instructor. Students were instructed to individually take notes during the readings, but not to attempt to write what they hear word-for-word. Students were then divided into four groups (A, B, C, and D). Groups B and C consisted of non-heritage learners only, while groups D and A included both heritage and non-heritage learners. This study reports findings from groups B and C only. At the end of the entire dictogloss activity, students were asked to reflect as a group upon their experience and how they approached the text reconstruction task.

**Arabic text**

 إليكم طريقة تحضير الهريسة: أولاً: اخلطي السميد وجوز الينجر والسكر. في وعاء آخر اخلطي اللبن مع الخميرة إلى أن تكون الخلطة، ثم أضيفي قطرة الليمون إلى خلطة اللبن والخميرة. أضيفي هذه الخلطة إلى السميد والسكر وجوز الينجر ثانياً: ادهني الصينية بالزيت وصبي فيها الخلطة

ثالثاً: ضعي الصينية في الفرن لمدة غز_hits دقيقة.

**English translation**

Here is the recipe for preparing “Harisa’ (a kind of dessert):
First. Mix semolina, coconut (shaves) and sugar. In another bowl mix yogurt and yeast until the mixture rises, then add lemon peel to the yogurt and yeast mixture. Add to this mixture the semolina, sugar and coconut (shaves).

Second: Dab the baking sheet with butter and pour the mixture inside it.

Third: Place the baking sheet in the oven for twenty minutes.

**Imperative verbs: total (7)**

اخلطي 2 X أضفي 2 X ادهني 1 X صبي 1 X ضعي

**Key words: total (12)**

سميد - جوز الهند - السكر - وعاء - اللبن - الخبزية - الخليطة - قشر الليمون - الصينية - الزبدة - الفرن - مدة

**Data analysis and results**

Tables 1 and 2 show texts produced by groups C and B, respectively. In each table, individual student notes are first presented followed by the collective group text reconstruction.

**Table 1: group (C)**

Figure 1: Mark (C)
Figure 2: Jumana (C)

Figure 3: Hala (C)
Figure 4: Aya (C)

Figure 5: group (C) reconstructed text
Table 2: group (B)

Figure 6: Emma (B)

Figure 7: Kathy (B)
Yelin

Figure 8: Yelin (B)

- اخلطي السكر
- خض فيه الليمون
- حوّل إلى حبة

Figure 9: group (B) reconstructed text

- Group B: Ema, Yelin, Kathy

إخلطي سكيد وسك وجوز الهند في واح آخر خلطة الليمون وقم بمراهمة وفروضها على الخلطة إضفي قشر الليمون إلى الخلطة وقم بمراهمة وفروضها وإضفي خلطة سكيد وسك وجوز الهند إلى الخلطة آخر إهد النصيحة بزيادة وصب فيها الخلطة وضعفي الصينية في فرن لمدة 15 دقيقة.
The data were analyzed for the number of imperatives and key vocabulary items produced by individuals and groups. First, I compared the number of imperative verbs produced correctly by each individual student with the number of imperatives in the original text (total 7). I also compared the number of imperatives produced by each group as a whole with the number of imperatives found in the original text. Then, I counted the number of these key words that occurred in each individual student production and in each collective group production and compared with total key vocabulary items in the original text (12). Finally, I compared the reconstructed group texts with the original text in terms of discourse (order of steps). Therefore, there were three criteria for this analysis:

1. Correct form of the imperative verb in individual student notes as well as in group production of reconstructed text
2. Production of key content vocabulary words and imperative verbs in individual student notes as well as in group production of reconstructed text
3. Discourse or order of steps in the group product compared to original

Table 3: group (C) production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student-group</th>
<th>Imperatives (7)</th>
<th>Key Vocab (12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark-C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumana-C</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hala-C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aya-C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group-C</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: group (B) production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student-group</th>
<th>Imperatives (7)</th>
<th>Key Vocab (12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ema-B</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy-B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelin-B</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group-B</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that individual notes for group (C) were varied in terms of the amount of imperatives and key vocabulary words recorded. Jumana produced the most notes in the group in terms of the number of imperative verbs and key vocabulary. Hala was unable to note down any imperative verbs, while Mark produced only one imperative verb. Aya recorded two imperatives. In terms of key vocabulary, Mark and Jumana wrote down eight each out of twelve key words, while Hala and Aya recorded half of that amount. In contrast to individual notes, all seven imperative verbs were produced in the group (C) reconstructed text (figure 5 above). However, the gender feature on all seven imperatives was reproduced as masculine, whereas in the original text, the gender form was feminine in all imperatives. Group (B) also missed discourse markers (first, second, and third), but the order of steps
matched that of the original.

In their collective group reflection following the dictogloss activity, group (C) provided insight into how they went about completing this task. They wrote “We visualized the steps and used context clues [for example] the butter and what it is used for. [We] looked for imperatives and wrote down what we knew the first time and added more the second and third time around. Reading the passage prior to this helped and it was familiar. Writing our own recipes helped us a lot.”

Table 4 shows the results form group (B). Individuals in group (B) produced more imperative verbs than in group (C); however, none of them produced all imperatives individually. Only Ema was able to write down all key words. The final product of this group is similar to that of group (C). Both groups produced all seven imperative verbs and all twelve key vocabulary items. However, unlike group (C), group (B) marked all imperative verbs’ feminine feature as in the original. Although this group missed the discourse markers (first, second and third), they reconstructed the text as a paragraph with correct order of steps. In their collective reflection group (B) wrote “We focused on instruction (steps) rather than individual words getting them perfectly. We focused on key ideas and we listened for words that let us know what steps we were on (first, second).”

Discussion

Dictogloss portends to counter students’ lack of ‘noticing’ of important vocabulary and structural forms and ultimately to improve their linguistic accuracy by making form-meaning connections. In this study, dictogloss was used to ascertain learners’ ability to ‘notice’ and ultimately produce imperative verbs in Arabic and key vocabulary from a recipe. The dictogloss was administered at the end of a food unit that included reading a recipe passage, discussion of the reading passage, and group presentations of favorite recipes. Therefore, there was ample opportunity for students to learn about the use of imperatives and key recipe words in a meaningful and communication-rich environment.

The results of this study show that when students worked collaboratively on the reconstruction of the original text, they were able to reconstruct a matching text having the same targeted forms and vocabulary. They were able to do this despite the fact that their individual notes were sketchy and do not represent all features of the original text. The gap between the limited production of key vocab and key verb forms as student worked independently, and the complete production of highlighted vocabulary and verb forms when they collaborated in group work has been bridged. In order to close the gap, students were involved in communication-rich interaction. Although it may be suggested that more proficient students in the group prompted the improvement by providing more input, it can still be argued that the discussion within the group yielded clear benefit as weaker students learn the key structures and vocabulary from their stronger peers, who in turn reinforce their knowledge through the act of teaching. All learners gain from dictogloss activities that necessitate deliberate focus on the key structures and vocabulary essential to comprehending authentic texts and ultimately being able to reconstruct them.

In conclusion, this experience of using dictogloss to reinforce noticing and ultimately production of the imperative verb and some key lexicon showed positive
results represented in the groups’ ability to comprehend and reconstruct a text that matches the theme that they have been learning about, i.e. foods. It is evident from the groups’ reconstructed texts that both accuracy of target forms and the ability to understand and reproduce target-like texts have been achieved through collaborative work within the framework of a dictogloss task. Despite the fact that neither of the two groups produced the discourse markers (first, second, and third) in their reconstructed texts, the order of the steps in the recipe is maintained. The results also show that group (C) changed the gender feature on all imperative verbs from feminine to masculine by dropping the feminine marker –ee at the end of the imperative verb. There are two plausible explanations for this deviation in group (C) reconstruction. It is possible that the students in this group reconstructed by addressing it to the (male) instructor. The second explanation has to do with markedness theory in SLA, which stipulates that acquisition of marked grammatical features is delayed compared to unmarked ones of the same structure. The gender of Arabic verbs is either male or female, and the male feature is less marked (Husseinali, 2006); therefore, it is acquired first.

In light of these findings, this study has limitations that affect generalizability of its results. First, there is no documentation of interaction incidents inside the groups. Recording and collecting discussions inside the groups would have shed some light on how learners went about reconstructing their texts. Second, the results are based on only one dictogloss task administered within a normal class time. Future studies on dictogloss could benefit by avoiding both limitations in the research design.

References


The Effects of Interactive Note-taking on Increasing Rigor and Student Achievement for High-School Foreign Language

Laura Droms
Mountain View High School, Gwinnett County GA

Abstract

This study examined the effects of interactive note-taking, a method that relies on student interaction with teacher-provided notes, on student test scores and critical thinking skills in the high-school Spanish classroom. It also examined how interactive note-taking affected students’ confidence in note-taking and critical thinking skills and their level of participation in the classroom. Over a five-week period, interactive note-taking was implemented in one class (n = 29) while traditional foreign language methods were used in another class (n = 32). Changes in student evaluative performances were determined by comparing pre-intervention test scores to test scores during the intervention period. Pretest and posttest scores on a critical thinking skills test were used to determine the effects on critical thinking skills. Surveys were used to ascertain the effects on students’ confidence, and field notes and participation data were used to assess the quantity and quality of student participation in the classroom. Results indicated an increase in student test scores, critical thinking skills, and the quantity and quality of student participation with the use of interactive note-taking, but no significant differences were found for student confidence.

Are high-school teachers effectively equipping students with the skills to be critical thinkers or just teaching them to regurgitate information to which they have been exposed? In order to be successful in college or the workplace, students must be adept at critical thinking skills, yet in a newsletter article, the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (CCSRI, 2006) reported that enrollment in remedial programs in colleges and job-training is staggeringly high, with 28% of students in four-year colleges and 42% in two-year colleges requiring remediation. This strong indicator of being unprepared for post-secondary work has led to a cry for increased rigor in high school classrooms. Rigor, however, is difficult to define and is not easily measured by standardized test scores. In Teaching What Matters Most, Strong, Silver, and Perini (2001) offer one of the best definitions of rigor stating “rigor is the goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging” (p. 7). The challenge facing schools today is how to apply this and similar definitions to the high school curriculum.
The school for the current study is part of a diverse, urban school district. This school outlined as one of its goals the establishment of a standard for rigor across the curriculum in hopes that it would give students the confidence to enroll in more AP courses. As a strategy for reaching that goal, the school created a K-12 vertical team to pilot an interactive note-taking (INT) program. INT is a type of split-page note-taking. Notes addressing important concepts are provided on the right side of the note-taking page. On the left side of the note-taking page, students are encouraged to interact with the information found on the right side. The left-side activities range from focused practice, to summarization of new information, to application of information into new and creative situations. While note-taking has been widely accepted as an important tool for success and a means for learning new information in an academic setting, it has not often been associated with rigor. Hess, Jones, Carlock, and Walkup (2009) found that rigor increases as a result of participating in critical-thinking activities. Effective note-taking employs critical thinking, such as filtering and organizing new information, so that it can be integrated into existing knowledge (Makany, Kemp, & Dror, 2009; Marzano, 1993). Therefore, it may be suggested that note-taking can become a rigorous exercise that enhances learning and may even produce new pathways of thinking. This postulation provides the impetus of the present study, the purpose of which is to determine if INT is a rigorous classroom activity that increases student performance in foreign language and improves critical thinking skills, student confidence, and class participation.

**Review of the Literature**

**Rigor and Critical Thinking Skills**

Some school districts, administrators, and even teachers, have misinterpreted a call for increased rigor to be a call for increased course requirements. However, what is actually needed is an increase of rigorous content and activities at the classroom level (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006). In an attempt to clarify rigor and assess the application of rigorous processes in the classroom, Hess et al. (2009) designed a cognitive rigor matrix combining Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge model. Progressing from basic recall activities to higher-order critical thinking activities is an effective way to increase rigor in the content of classroom instruction (Hess et al., 2009; McCollister & Sayler, 2010). In a review of critical thinking strategies, Marzano (1993) identified information-processing strategies as one of the primary methods used for increasing critical thinking in the classroom, and includes note-taking as a method of information processing. Even though some forms of encoding, such as recall, are low-level, conscious encoding strategies that encourage linking and the creation of mental images are high-level activities (Marzano, 1993). Note-taking, if appropriately designed to encourage linking, can facilitate the encoding process.

**Note-taking Strategies**

There is an extensive body of literature concerning the effectiveness of note-taking and the associated activity of reviewing notes. Kobayashi (2006) completed a meta-analysis focused on the effects of note-taking and note-reviewing interven-
The Effects of Interactive Note-taking 61

tions on student learning and found that the greatest effect on student learning was when notes were provided to students. Further, he found the benefit of intervention was greater with high-school students as compared to undergraduate students. These findings support the importance of testing innovative note-taking interventions especially with high-school students.

When analyzing strategies such as hierarchical organization and problem-solving are built into note-taking, students are able to process new information more thoroughly. Marzano (1993) reported that note-taking can be a strategy for analyzing and understanding the hierarchical organization of new information, but students must be able to effectively organize and analyze this information. Huxham (2010) found that certain lecture activities, such as PowerPoint slides and interactive opportunities (a problem presented by the lecturer for students to analyze and discuss), were more likely than others to cue student note-taking and produce more thorough notes. Titsworth (2004) also recognized that teacher cues for these analyzing strategies could affect student note-taking and, more specifically, the effectiveness of student notes, increasing both the amount of detail and organizational points.

The findings of Titsworth (2004) may also help explain why the use of graphic organizers that improve student organization of information, such as the one in Robinson et al. (2006), are successful in improving student achievement. Robinson et al. found that students with partial graphic organizer notes (which encourage the use of analytical strategies) outperformed students with completed graphic organizers. These students also converted from linear to graphic note-taking at higher proportions than those students receiving completed graphic organizers. The success of these partial graphic organizers contradicts to some extent the findings of Kobayashi (2006) because the students provided with completed graphic organizers did not perform as well as those with partial notes, suggesting that while having some notes provided is beneficial, full notes are not.

In a specific study on the effects of guided note-taking, Cardetti, Kahmsemanan, and Orgnero (2010) found that the mean scores for mathematics students using partial notes were higher on all the examinations than the mean scores for students not using partial notes, with the greatest difference being on the final cumulative exam. While mathematics and foreign language may not seem similar on the surface, they both require skill building and relational understandings that accumulate throughout the course, requiring understanding and mastery before advancing. Due to this similarity, the success of partial notes in mathematics is significant for foreign language. The use of partial notes or similar strategies could have similar results in increasing student achievement in foreign language.

One of the benefits of the usage of partial notes documented in the student surveys from the Cardetti et al. (2010) study was that prepared notes allowed students to be more attentive to the lecture and less focused on writing all that they heard. Konrad, Joseph, and Evelleigh (2009) also found in their meta-analysis of guided notes that most students preferred guided notes, possibly because guided notes reduced frustration that students often feel when trying to keep up with note-taking in class. By freeing up some of a student’s working memory with the provision of some of the notes, the cognitive load for a note-taking task is decreased. Cognitive load is naturally high in a foreign language classroom because the language of instruction is
not the first language of students, so implementation of any strategy that reduces the cognitive load has the potential to improve student performance.

In addition to partial notes, the use of non-linear notes has been shown to reduce cognitive load in note-taking because non-linear notes make connections between ideas more apparent visually than linear notes. These visual connections allow students to store information spatially, as well as verbally, in memory (Katayama & Robinson, 2000). Markany, Kemp, and Dror (2009) found that non-linear note-takers outperformed linear note-takers in several areas, but of statistical significance were the findings on comprehension and metacognition in which non-linear note-takers were able to summarize what they heard more coherently and were more positive about their own note-taking abilities. Katayama and Robinson (2000) had similar findings when comparing students using graphically-organized notes and outline notes at varying levels of completeness. While they did not find an advantage to graphically-organized notes on the factual test, students using graphic organizers did outperform students using outlines on application tests. These findings highlight the benefit of non-linear note-taking strategies for activities and assessments that involve higher levels of critical thinking.

The use of Cornell notes, in which students record various cognitive levels of information in sections, is another note-taking strategy that can promote higher-order thinking. This use of higher-order thinking and summarization encourages students to be more rigorous in their note-taking methods (Hess et al., 2009; Marzano, 1993; McCollister & Sayler, 2010). Donohoo (2010) studied the use of Cornell notes in ninth and tenth grade science classes. After training students to use Cornell notes, course grade averages increased 10%-12% over the previous semester and 100% of students passed the course midterm using Cornell as compared to 70% of students passing who did not use Cornell notes (Donohoo, 2010). These increases show that increasing rigor in note-taking can increase student test scores.

Some final note-taking strategies to be addressed in this review are parallel note-taking strategies. Three studies using various versions of parallel note-taking showed that students believed these methods to be helpful for understanding and processing new information. Pardini, Domizi, Forbes, and Pettis (2005) found that after being taught the parallel note-taking method as a way to interact with Webnotes (instructor-provided lecture notes online), 67% of all responses concerning student use of Webnotes referred to interacting with the notes or annotating the notes at some point. Stencel (1998) reported that students felt that interactive lecture notebooks allowed them to concentrate on the presentation and participate more in learning new information. In addition, students had the opportunity to summarize daily and clarify understanding. Wang (2000) found that both teacher and students found double entry notebooks to be rewarding and helpful. The limitation for all three of these studies is that the results did not provide empirical evidence that the use of parallel note-taking, interactive lecture notebooks, or double entry notebooks actually contributed to student achievement. Rather, qualitative data of student self-reported satisfaction and feelings of success with these note-taking methods merit validation via other sources of supporting data.
Peer Collaboration

The advantage to both parallel note-taking and interactive lecture notebooks is that they emphasize interaction. Note-taking is typically thought of as an individual activity, but research suggests that collaboration with peers may increase the effects of good note-taking strategies. Huxham (2010) tested various note-taking cues to see how they affected the quality of student notes. The highest quality of notes that demonstrated completeness and understanding came from the interactive window cue that incorporates students' own thoughts and small group discussions, supplementing the words of the lecturer.

Little research exists on annotations, collaboration, and note-taking specifically in a foreign language classroom. However, Jones (2006) analyzed the effects of collaboration and annotation on increasing student recall and recognition of vocabulary and propositions from a recorded listening activity in a French class. Even though she found that collaboration did not increase performance on a low-level processing activity such as vocabulary recall or recognition, it did significantly increase performance on the higher-level processing activity of summarization. Further, in examining the notes of all students, Jones found that students in the collaboration and annotation group produced more notes than other groups in the study.

Although extensive research exists on note-taking, research is very limited on the effects of using note-taking to promote critical thinking in the foreign language classroom. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of INT on student test scores, improvement in critical thinking skills, student confidence in note-taking abilities, and student participation during class in the high-school foreign language classroom. The following research questions guide this study:

1. Does the use of INT in foreign language instruction improve student test scores in high-school foreign language classes? If so, how significant is the improvement?
2. Does the use of INT improve critical thinking skills for students in high-school foreign language classes? If so, how significant is the improvement?
3. Does the use of INT improve students' confidence in note-taking and critical thinking activities? If so, how significant is the improvement?
4. Does using INT change student participation in the classroom? If so, how is the participation changed?

Methods

Participants

Sixty-one students attending a public high school in an urban area of the Southeastern United States volunteered for this study. All were enrolled in Honors Spanish II classes taught by the researcher and were assigned to the classes by a computerized scheduling program. The students had been taught Spanish I by different teachers. None of the students had been taught by the teacher-researcher in the past.

The two classes were randomly assigned to either the control group or the INT group. Students in both groups represented primarily eleventh and twelfth grade.
In the control group there were 16 sophomores, 14 juniors, and 2 seniors. In the INT group there were 16 sophomores and 13 juniors. The student participants represented both regular and gifted ability levels and were ethnically diverse. The average end-of-course grade in Spanish I for the control group was 89.25 (SD = 5.96), and the average end-of-course grade in Spanish I for the INT group was 91.90 (SD = 3.75). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics for both the control group and INT group. The researcher participated in this study as a teacher-researcher, providing instruction in both classes and designing and administering assessments and surveys.

Table 1

Demographic Data of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Designations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT Group</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intervention

Students were assigned to classes by convenience sampling, followed by a random assignment of classes to the control group or INT group. Both the control and INT groups received instruction by the same teacher and were taught the vocabulary and grammar concepts concerning daily routines and clothing as presented in Prentice Hall’s *Realidades* 2. The groups spent equal time on each component of the unit (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, culture).

Prior to the start of the intervention period, all students were given a pretest on critical thinking skills and a confidence survey (see Appendices A & B). Both groups were administered the same regular course assessments, such as quizzes and chapter tests, throughout the intervention. Student classroom participation in both groups was also monitored daily by the teacher throughout the intervention period with the use of a tally instrument (see Appendix C). After the intervention period, students in both groups were given a posttest on critical thinking skills and the confidence survey.

Students in the control group practiced vocabulary using activities from the textbook or activities created by the teacher-researcher. These activities included traditional activities used in the foreign language classroom, such as surveys, partner exercises, reading activities, and writing exercises. New grammar concepts were introduced using the textbook ancilliary grammar videos. Following the grammar videos, the teacher-researcher gave brief ten-minute lectures on the concepts. To practice new grammar concepts, students used textbook activities and teacher-created practice worksheets. During the six days of in which students rotated through student learning centers, students participated in review activities for 25 minutes before beginning center activities. Center activities included reading, writing, and application tasks related to the chapter that were completed while working with a small group of peers.

Students in the INT group were taught using INT 12 times during the inter-
vention period. The first eight INT lessons were given during the first 14 days of the intervention and lasted for full 50-minute class periods. There were four INT lessons per chapter, one related to vocabulary, two related to grammar, and one based on a reading activity. Vocabulary INT lessons included a lesson using the Videohistoria from the text. Students were given a cloze version of the video script on the right side of the page. Using prior vocabulary knowledge, students completed the script and interacted with it on the left side, illustrating some scenes, summarizing others.

After completing the notes, students watched the full video to verify and confirm understanding. Grammar INT lessons covered a variety of grammatical concepts, but all grammar lessons included notes on the right side and practice opportunities for students on the left side. The left-side activities included tasks such as illustrating reflexive versus non-reflexive verbs, creating personal examples of sentences using ser and estar, graphic organizers of possessive adjectives, etc. For the reading INT lessons, students were given articles related to the unit topics to read. The texts of the articles were provided on the right side, while on the left side, students identified main ideas, illustrated styles described in the article, selected advice that was most pertinent to their own lives, etc. Following the reading of both articles, students were given summarizing activities and personalization activities in which they defended choices they had made. During the six days of centers, the students were given INT lessons four times for half of the class period (25 minutes). These four lessons were based on review of grammar concepts in the unit. The other two days of centers, the INT group did the same activities as the control group.

For each INT lesson, students were given split-page note sheets containing teacher notes on the right side and opportunities for student input on the left-side. Students completed left-side activities on their own, but were given the opportunity to collaborate with peers while completing six of the INT lessons. Collaboration opportunities were given so that students could work together to negotiate and create meaning for left-side activities. During these lessons, the classroom was arranged so that students could easily rotate through various collaborative partners.

All students completed the same in-class mini-projects to practice the new vocabulary and grammar. Both classes participated in six days of 25-minute centers based on applications of new skills prior to the unit test. All students participated in the same review games and were given the same review materials prior to all unit assessments (tests and quizzes).

Data Collection Techniques

**Evaluative assessments.** Each of the assessment measures was a combination of multiple-choice and fill-in-the blank formats. Each measure contained modified sections of assessment activities created by Prentice-Hall for the Realidades 2 textbook series. Each of the assessments was reviewed by teachers of the same course for peer validation. Spanish II quizzes (Quiz 2A and Quiz 2B) administered during the unit contained 25 questions pertaining to the vocabulary and grammar from their respective sections of the unit and the 50-question Spanish II test assessed all of the concepts from the both quizzes. Since the students often cannot understand the questions prior to starting a unit because they have not learned the vocabulary or grammar, a pretest of this content is primarily a guessing game and not a reliable way
to measure improvement. Therefore, a pretest was not given to either group. To establish that both groups were equivalent prior to the intervention, baseline achievement data was established by analyzing the scores of both groups on the unit one test (pre-intervention). The same statistical analysis was performed on the scores for the unit two test (post-intervention) and compared to the baseline data to evaluate differences in test scores.

Critical thinking skills test. Marzano (1993) and Hess et al. (2009) identified classroom activities that could be used to enhance critical thinking skills. Using these activities as examples, the researcher developed a Critical Thinking Skills Test (CTST) (see Appendix A). The questions for both the pretest-form and the posttest-form instruments were the same, but the cultural reading selections used as the basis for the two test forms were different. Students were asked to identify main ideas and supporting details of the texts, explain the relationship between these elements, and compare the new information learned in the texts to their own cultural experiences. The open-ended sections of the CTST were scored using the scoring rubrics included in those sections. The CTST was validated by peer review and pilot-testing with five students. This peer review and pilot-testing generated feedback for the researcher to establish content validation of the CTST instrument, strengthening interpretations that link student responses to critical thinking skills.

Confidence survey. The Student Confidence Survey (SCS) is a 20-question Likert-scale survey in which ten questions address note-taking confidence and ten questions address confidence in critical thinking skills (see Appendix B). Skill ratings ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As with the CTST, this survey was developed by the researcher and validated by peer review and pilot-testing with five students. The SCS was administered to both classes before and after the intervention period.

Participation ratio. The class participation ratio score was a collective score determined daily by dividing the total number of student comments and responses by the total number of questions asked by the researcher. The researcher kept a tally of teacher questions and student comments on a clipboard during each class period during the intervention.

Quality of participation (QOP) tally. In order to compare the quality of student participation and interaction during class, question-type and response-type tallies were collected using the QOP tally form (Appendix C). The QOP allowed the researcher to record the types of questions being asked of students as well as the complexity of student responses. At the end of the intervention period, the daily tallies were compiled and graphed according to response-type for each group.

Fieldnotes. Reflective field notes were recorded daily by the researcher after teaching each class session involved in the study. The researcher recorded information concerning on-task or off-task behaviors of students in the class and the observed level of participation. A process for identifying emergent patterns and themes in the data was used to code field notes.
Results

The data collected in this study compared students learning high-school Spanish without the use of INT to students learning Spanish with the use of INT. The results were based on the analysis of the data collected from chapter quizzes and tests, a critical thinking skills test, and a confidence survey. The results of the chapter quizzes, tests, and the critical thinking skills test were analyzed by computing the mean and standard deviation of each assessment and performing a two-tailed t-test between the control group and INT group. The SCS responses were also averaged and two-tailed t-tests comparing the pre-intervention and post-intervention responses within each group were performed. The amount and type of participation were analyzed by graphing the results, and the daily journal notes were reviewed and coded for themes. This data was used to determine the effectiveness of INT in the high-school foreign language classroom.

The Unit 1 test was used as a pretest to establish a baseline for student test score data. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for the baseline assessment given to both the control group and the INT group. Although the mean score of the INT Group was higher than that of the control group, there was not a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($p = .05$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Baseline Test Score Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unit 1 Test</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>88.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT Group</td>
<td>92.86</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

During the intervention period, two chapter quizzes and a unit test were used to determine the effectiveness of INT on student test scores. A comparison of the scores of these assessments between the control group and the INT group are shown in Table 3. On the first assessment during intervention, the 2A Quiz, the mean score of the INT group ($M = 85.66$) was higher than the mean score of the control group ($M = 80.44$), but the difference was not statistically significant ($t(59) = –1.58$, $p = .12$). On the second assessment (2B Quiz) and the third assessment (Unit 2 Test), the differences between the mean score of the INT group and the control group were statistically significant ($t(59) = –3.13$, $p = .00$, $t(59) = –2.27$, $p = .03$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Comparison of Test Scores during Intervention Period</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2A Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>80.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT Group</td>
<td>85.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$
The effect size of the intervention was determined by calculating Cohen’s d for each of the three assessments. Early in the intervention, the intervention had a medium effect ($d = 0.41$) on student performance on the written test, increasing scores in the intervention group by approximately 6%. An average INT student at this point in the intervention could be expected to outscore 66% of students in the control group. At the end of the intervention, the use of INT still had a medium effect ($d = 0.59$) on the unit test scores, although the effect was stronger. An average student using INT could be expected to outscore almost 73% of students in the control group, and the INT intervention increased scores approximately 10%.

In order to determine the effectiveness of INT at improving critical thinking skills, students were given both pretest and posttest forms of the CTST. At the start of the intervention, the difference between the pretest scores of the two groups was not statistically significant ($t(59) = –0.03, p = .97$), establishing that the groups were comparable. At the end of the intervention, there was a greater difference between the two groups, but it was not statistically significant ($t(59) = –1.79, p = .08$). Table 4 shows the results for the pretest and posttest for the control group and Table 5 shows the results for the INT group. Although the comparison between the groups was not statistically significant, there was a significant difference ($t(56) = –2.34, p = .02$) between the pretest and posttest scores of the INT group. The difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the control group were not statistically significant ($t(62) = –0.59, p = .56$).

### Table 4

**Control Group Comparison of CTST Pretest and Posttest**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>p</th>
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<td>–0.59</td>
<td>.56</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12.53</td>
<td>2.45</td>
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### Table 5

**INT Group Comparison of CTST Pretest and Posttest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>2.53</td>
<td>–2.34</td>
<td>.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>13.45</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$

The SCS, which takes into account both note-taking confidence and confidence in critical thinking skills, was administered before and after the intervention period to determine if the use of INT improved student confidence in either of these areas. Since the SCS was anonymous, the responses for each item of the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys were averaged and compared. The first ten items addressed confidence in note-taking. For items 2 and 7, a lower average indicated higher confidence. For all other items, a higher average indicated greater confidence.

In the control group, although six responses indicated greater confidence in
the post-intervention survey, the difference between the pre-intervention and post-intervention responses was not statistically significant for any statement. For the INT group, seven responses indicated greater confidence in the post-intervention SCS. Even so, the difference between pre- and post-intervention responses was not statistically significant. Among the INT group responses, the gains on the averages for item 5 (+0.51), “When given notes, I am comfortable adding my own thoughts to the notes,” and item 10 (+0.48) “I am comfortable learning new information through the process of note-taking,” were larger than those of any of the other items, and larger than any change in averages of the control group. The full results for both groups are provided in Appendix D.

The last ten items of the SCS addressed confidence in critical thinking skills. While some of the response averages increased for both groups, such as item 5 “I am confident that I can make comparisons between different ideas,” neither group had differences that were statistically significant. The full results for both groups are provided in Appendix E.

Throughout the course of the intervention student participation was recorded through participation ratios, use of the QOP tally instrument, and field notes to determine if using INT increased both the amount of classroom participation and the quality of student participation in the classroom. Although data were collected each day during the intervention period, the results for class participation ratio scores and QOP tallies are only from days where the instruction between groups was different. In Figure 1 the participation ratio scores between the control group and the INT group are shown.

![Figure 1](image.png)

*Figure 1.* Participation ratio scores. The mean participation ratio score for the control group was 2.06 (SD = 1.18). The mean participation ratio score for the INT group was 2.82 (SD = 0.88).

There was a wide variation among the daily ratio scores of the control group with the highest ratio score of 4.5 occurring on the fifth day of the intervention. The daily ratio scores of the intervention group were also varied with the highest ratio score of 4.5 occurring on the fourteenth day of the intervention period. The ratio scores of the INT group were consistently higher than those of the control group with the control group having a higher ratio only twice, on intervention days five and six.
Data results drawn from tallies using the QOP differed between the control group and INT group. Of the types of student classroom participation, single-word responses (e.g., sí, no, el desodorante) and high-frequency lexicalized expressions (e.g., me gusta, ¡claro que sí) were determined by the teacher-researcher to be lower-level thinking responses based on the fact that they did not require students to create innovative utterances. Sentence-level, paragraph-level, and general comments were grouped as higher-level thinking responses. The results of the QOP are presented in Figure 2. The INT Group not only had more incidences of higher-level thinking responses ($n = 88$), but also more incidences of responses overall ($N = 143$) than the control group ($n = 33, N = 95$).

![Figure 2. QOP results.](image)

Teacher field notes related to on-task behavior and level of student participation in the class were also used for data collection. Based on the analysis of these field notes, the researcher drew inferences indicating that students in the INT group were more actively engaged during class than the control group. On several note-taking days, only about half of the students in the control group were taking their own notes while all students in the INT group were actively completing the left section of their notes. The researcher also inferred that the INT group had greater diversity of participation due to a higher number of different students participating and contributing to the lessons compared to the control group. These interpretations additionally support the researcher’s assertion that the design of the INT lessons inspired more variety in the quality of student participation in the classroom and provided more student support, thereby encouraging significantly greater student participation.

**Discussion**

Student test scores in Spanish and critical thinking skills increased as a result of the INT intervention. By providing opportunities for students to interact with new information and process that information in a variety of ways, student test scores and critical thinking skills significantly increased. As a group, the INT students had higher test scores on all three assessments. Although the differences between the
control group and INT group were not statistically significant on the critical thinking skills assessment, there was a statistically significant difference ($p = .02$) between the pretest and posttest of critical thinking skills in the INT group, suggesting that INT can improve critical thinking skills. In this study, one possible explanation for the lack of a significant difference between groups is the high number of gifted students in both the control and intervention groups. The pretest scores for both groups showed that students already had good critical thinking skills, so there was little room for improvement in this area for some students.

INT also had a significant effect on the type and quality of student participation in the classroom. There was a notable difference in both the amount of classroom participation between the control group and the INT group and the type of participation between the two student groups. There was also a marked difference in the level of engagement in note-taking activities as recorded in the researcher’s field notes. The significantly higher number of higher-level thinking responses in the INT group supports the hypothesis that INT activities provide more opportunities for critical thinking than traditional activities and that the INT activities cultivate the confidence in students to participate at a higher cognitive level in the classroom.

The data results did not show a statistically significant increase in student confidence in note-taking and critical thinking activities for the INT group. However, although there were no statistically significant increases for either group in the area of note-taking confidence, the change in responses for item 5 (“I am comfortable adding my own thoughts...”) and item 10 (“I am comfortable learning new information through...note-taking”) in the INT group was noteworthy and greater than any response changes in the control group. Other studies (Markany et al., 2009; Pardini et al., 2005; Stencel, 1998; Wang, 2000) have concluded that non-traditional note-taking methods have a positive impact on students’ perceptions and attitudes about their own note-taking. In the present study, the increase in responses for items 5 and 10 on the posttest form of the SCS supports that earlier research, as student responses for the INT group indicated that they feel more comfortable adding their own thoughts to their notes and learning new information through note-taking after the experience with INT.

Since the INT activities required greater application of critical thinking skills than the traditional activities used with the control group, one would expect increased student confidence in this area. However, the survey results did not indicate any significant change in student confidence in the area of critical thinking skills. Although student performance in critical thinking skills did improve, it might be suggested that there is a lag time between improvement and confidence; but such a claim merits further inquiry into lag times between actual improvement and perception of improvement.

As a result of INT, students significantly increased their scores on assessments in Spanish language classes. As reported in Cardetti et al. (2010), increases in student test performance continue to grow over time in courses where skills build on each other, such as mathematics. Since acquisition of a foreign language is based on skill-building over time, the teacher-researcher purports that student test performance would continue to increase, becoming more statistically significant over time. This study shows that INT had a significant impact on increasing critical thinking skills.
Given that finding, this teacher-researcher believes that as students become more competent in their own critical thinking, the rigor of classroom activities can be increased. As teachers are able to increase the rigor of classroom activities, student learning is also increased.

Findings from this study also show that the quality of student participation in classroom activities increased in rigor with nearly three times the amount of higher-level thinking responses occurring in the INT group than in the control group. Although the results did not show a significant impact on student confidence in note-taking and critical thinking activities, this teacher-researcher believes that over time, these results would continue to increase and become more significant as well, especially given a context of ongoing opportunity to advance these skills through the INT method.

INT combines many different strategies of note-taking methods that have been shown in previous research to be effective (Donohoo, 2010; Huxham, 2010; Jones, 2006; Katayama & Robinson, 2000; Pardini et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2006; Stencel, 1998; Wang, 2000). In this study, INT had a positive impact on student achievement, critical thinking, and student classroom participation. These results have inspired this teacher-researcher to incorporate INT into all of her other classes. While the use of INT in every class session may be unrealistic, its incorporation on a regular basis is a worthwhile endeavor. Other foreign language teachers, as well as teachers from other disciplines and among various grade-levels, should consider incorporating INT into their own teaching repertoire as a way to increase rigor in the classroom and improve student achievement and critical thinking abilities.

There are limitations to this study that should be considered when determining the reliability of these results. The study was conducted over a five-week period, a limited period of time to observe significant changes in critical thinking skills or student confidence. Future research could focus on a longitudinal study to examine whether the effects of INT continue to increase. Further, the study was conducted solely in foreign language classrooms, and these student groups did not include any special needs students. Future research could improve the reliability of this study by increasing the number of student study participants and by expanding the participants to include students from additional subgroups representing the school-aged population. There is a compelling need for extending this research into other disciplines, grade-levels, and school settings as there is presently very limited research specifically focused on INT. The educational profession-at-large would certainly benefit from further inquiry into INT and its academic benefits.

Endnotes

1 See https://www.dropbox.com/sh/oa62r1v3fgrju06/g9ivzgiWQO

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Online Translator Usage in Foreign Language Writing

Errol M. O’Neill
University of Memphis

Abstract

With the increasing availability of technology, one issue that has arisen in foreign language education is the use of online translation (OT) sites that claim to convert text from one language to another but are generally prohibited for classwork due to ethical and pedagogical concerns. In a study to explore the effects of OT usage, teacher raters were able to determine, to a statistically significant level, on which compositions OT was used; there were, however, a number of cases for which OT use went undetected and some instances it was incorrectly suspected. This article discusses the results of the study and implications for language instruction. Since compositions written with the help of OT cannot always be distinguished from those written with such aid, instructors and institutions may wish to review their approach to dealing with the issue of online translators in the classroom as well as policies concerning academic sanctions.

Information technology has transformed the way people interact, communicate, and learn. These changes have been making their way into the field of foreign language education, from the use of electronic tools such as eBooks and collaborative wiki projects during instructional time, to the expansion of distance learning and the existence of other online resources available to students outside the walls of the traditional classroom.

One such tool that is freely available to the general public is online translation (OT). Websites such as Babel Fish, the first online translator once hosted by Alta Vista and Yahoo, which has now been replaced by Microsoft's Bing Translator <http://www.microsofttranslator.com>, Google Translate<http://translate.google.com>, and Free Translation <http://freetranslation.com>, purportedly translate text that has been entered into the online translator from one language to another with the click of a button. OT sites pose particular challenges for teachers of foreign languages since they offer to convert text, ranging from single words to paragraph-length writing and beyond, into the target language for anyone who visits the site, including students.

OT sites differ from dictionaries in that the latter generally suggest several possible translations for a word or expression, often with examples and usage notes to guide the learner in the use and acquisition of the language and leaving to the writer the task of successfully integrating the items consulted into the composition. The former, online translators, typically provide one ready-made translation that the
Online Translator Usage in Foreign Language Writing

writer can simply copy and paste. Additionally, unlike OT sites, dictionaries have been considered to be beneficial to students writing in a foreign language. Hurman and Tall (2002) found, for example, that students received 9% higher scores when they used a dictionary during composition writing than when they did not use one. In light of the unproven nature of online translators and concerns about what they mean for academic honesty and language acquisition, policies for dealing with online translators vary. Such policies include prohibiting their use and imposing academic sanctions on students suspected of using them, assigning students a lower grade for compositions on which the instructor believes OT was used, and grading such essays on their own merits, with the assumption that students would receive a lower grade than they would have had they not used an online translator (McCarthy, 2004). Many of these approaches presuppose that instructors can readily identify OT use in compositions they receive, but no comprehensive study examining online translation use among students has been found.

This article first discusses a selection of the literature related to the general issue of online translators for foreign language learning and instruction, which helped inform the current investigation. Next, there will be a description of a study conducted in which some student compositions were written with the help of OT while others were composed without such aid. As part of this study, foreign language instructors were asked to judge if each composition was, in their view, written with the help of an online translator. The results of their judgments will be presented, along with a small sampling of rater comments describing the reasons for their decision as well as illustrative excerpts from the compositions they rated. Finally, the limitations of the current study, as well as implications of the results in regards to foreign language instruction and policy, will be discussed.

**Literature Review**

Overall, the literature has viewed OT as harmful and ill-advised for foreign language learners. This perception can largely be attributed to the notion that online translators are known to make some lexical (Cribb, 2000), grammatical (Aiken & Wong, 2006), and syntactic (Watters & Patel, 2000) errors. In addition, considerations of academic honesty can affect how OT is perceived (Stapleton, 2005), since students using an online translator are seen as not doing their own work. There are concerns that OT may adversely affect acquisition or production of the target language and represent a waste of time for teacher and student alike (McCarthy, 2004). Niño (2009) mentions several potentially adverse aspects of OT use recognized by teachers and students alike, including inappropriate literal translation of lexical items, errors with grammatical items such as prepositions and agreement, problems with word order and sentence structure, difficulties with translating discursive and cultural references, and encouraging students to write first in the native language instead of the target language. SYSTRAN, the corporation that produced the Internet’s first online translator, *Babel Fish* (1997), admitted that their online translator had limitations and that they were aware that foreign language students were using their service, while pointing out that *Babel Fish* “was never meant to teach language” (Yang & Lange, 1998, p. 282) but instead intended to provide a free trial of machine translation software or a gist translation to the general public of text entered into the OT.
Nonetheless, there have been some in the field who have suggested possible uses and benefits of OT in the classroom. For example, Williams (2006) suggests that having students use online translators as part of a lesson can serve to help students understand concepts such as polysemy and structural ambiguity, both of which can pose problems for online translators that are unable to parse real-world referents in context. Burton (2003) mentions the possibility of students using online translators as a type of multilingual dictionary that could be used to explore the language or test hypotheses about vocabulary words. Niño (2009) lists several potential strengths of OT for foreign language students, including the immediacy of results for students wanting instant help for their language needs, as well as success with some shorter lexical units and simpler sentence structures. Additionally, she proposes allowing novice students to use OT for more difficult texts from the second language to the student’s native language for gisting purposes. Another suggestion by Niño (2009) is that parallel corpora could be used by instructors to highlight difficulties in translation, with the original text written in one language by a human and the other text being a translation into another language obtained from an OT site. Lastly, she suggests that instructor-led comparison of closely-related languages, e.g., Spanish and Italian, could allow for similarities and differences being highlighted both by successful and failed translations.

One recent study suggests that OT use may not have a negative impact on composition scores. In a study conducted at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, it was found that compositions written by third- and fourth-semester French students with access to an online translator, Free Translation <http://freetranslation.com>, did not receive lower global scores than those written without using OT (O’Neill, 2012). On global scores for the second of two experimental writing tasks, the experimental group that had received prior training in possible strengths and pitfalls of OT significantly outperformed ($p < .05$) the control group without such access or training. Additionally, it was reported that the translator group that had been trained in OT use received higher scores than the control group on four component scores (content, grammar, comprehensibility, and spelling/accents) on one or both experimental tasks. Furthermore, the experimental group that had access to an online translator but no prior training also outperformed the control group for these same components on at least one of the tasks. A description of these tasks, which are also those used for the current investigation, is discussed shortly.

Even if there may arguably be some beneficial instructional uses for online translators to help promote the understanding or exploration of foreign languages in the classroom, and while one study found no immediate negative effects on composition scores among students who used an online translator, questions over academic honesty and potential negative long-term effects of OT on foreign language writing still remain. Many instructors and institutions do not allow their students to use an online translator. Although the researcher has heard anecdotal reports of a number of teachers moving composition writing to the classroom to discourage students from accessing online translators, other instructors still allow students to write or rewrite compositions at home, leaving open the possibility that some are using a prohibited resource.

Luton (2003) advances three red flags (p. 768) that may indicate OT use. The
first of these includes mistranslated idioms, such as translating *I get upset* into French with *J'obtiens le renversement*, a phrase literally meaning *I obtain the turning-over* and whose intended meaning would be incomprehensible to a native speaker of French. Second are interspersed English words that the online translator has not converted to the target language due in particular to misspellings, such as *thier* instead of *their*. And third, Luton cites proper nouns incorrectly translated as common nouns, such as translating the name *Summer* to the French word *été*, indicating the season. Luton recognizes that this list is not exhaustive and that it may be difficult to tell at times if a given composition was written with the use of an online translator.

These observations are compounded by the fact that research has suggested that online translators can sometimes correctly convert text into the target language, although results have varied widely. Aiken and Wong (2006) conducted a study involving 20 Spanish-to-English translations of sentences that were selected randomly from a Spanish textbook. Sentences were entered into three online translators, *Babel Fish*, *SDL*, and *WorldLingo*. *Babel Fish* and *WorldLingo* were both outperformed (each with 55% grammatical and lexical accuracy) by another free OT system, *SDL* (75%), as judged by a formula including occurrence of missing or extraneous words, lexical choices, and total number of words versus number of correct words. Yates (2006) conducted a study that involved translating legal documents from German and Spanish into English. Five sentences were taken each from the German and Mexican civil codes and translated in *Babel Fish*, with an additional five sentences excerpted from each country's foreign ministry. A three-point scale was used to rank errors, from minor to severe. Yates found that 15 out of the 20 translation attempts were failed, with failed sentences containing anywhere from one to seven severe errors.

Ablanedo, Aiken, and Vanjani (2007) conducted a study comparing the success of *Babel Fish* to that of two human translators. Ten sentences were run through *Babel Fish* and separately given to a professional human translator and an intermediate-level speaker of Spanish. The authors found that *Babel Fish* correctly translated seven out of 10 English-language sentences into Spanish. This result compared unfavorably both to a professional human translator, who correctly translated all 10 sentences, and an intermediate Spanish speaker, from whom eight out of 10 translations were accurate. In what is described as the most extensive study of its kind, Aiken and Balan (2011) tested translations for six sentences among 2,550 language pairs in *Google Translate*. The six sentences included a selection from United Nations Declaration of Human Rights as well as the sentence *My hovercraft is full of eels*. The output was evaluated using the Bilingual Evaluation Understudy scale. The results for some language pairs yielded rankings as high as the maximum score of 100, or accurate enough for a human to understand, and as low as 0, or incomprehensible.

No known prior study specifically examines the accuracy of online translators when used for student writing. Given that online translators can in fact accurately translate some texts, while the writing of second-language learners can, like OT-produced text, also contain errors, it may not always be possible for instructors to determine whether or not a student has used an online translator while writing a composition. This research is guided by the following research question: Can instructors detect with statistical significance the difference between a text written with the aid of an online translator and one written without such aid?
Methods

A five-week study was conducted that involved 32 English-native learners of French at the third- and fourth-semester level at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign corresponding roughly to Novice High or Intermediate Low on the ACTFL written proficiency guidelines (ACTFL, 2001). Participants were asked to complete a background questionnaire, take a reading pretest, write four compositions: one written pretest, two experimental tasks, and one posttest, and fill out an exit questionnaire. In an attempt to minimize any potential negative effects that OT use might have on future acquisition or grades, participants included only students currently enrolled in their final semester of coursework in French. Additionally, the study was conducted near the end of the semester after all graded composition assignments had been completed.

Participants were divided into three treatment groups. Group A, the control group, had 10 participants who were not allowed to access an online translator, and received no training in OT. Group B (n = 11) was allowed to access Free Translation to assist in writing two experimental compositions (Tasks One and Two), but received no prior training in OT use. Group C (n = 11) was allowed to use Free Translation and received prior training about online translators before the two experimental tasks. None of the three groups was allowed access to other resources, including paper or electronic dictionaries, for any of the compositions. The tasks involved participants writing three-paragraph compositions based on provided prompts, which differed only in instructions on whether OT was prohibited (for participants in Group A, see Appendix A) or allowed (participants in Groups B and C, see Appendix B). The prompts provided to participants were developed for the study based on those used by Scott (1996). For tasks in which Groups B and C were instructed to use an online translator, they were free to use it as little or as much as they chose. Training for Group C involved a one-hour, instructor-led session with information and exercises related to how to use online translators, as well as a sheet on potential strengths and pitfalls of OT (Appendix C), while Groups A and B instead attended an instructor-led cultural lesson. All writing sessions, the cultural lesson, and translator training took place during regular class time or in the evening and were led and proctored by graduate teaching assistants (GTAs).

To ensure the groups were similar prior to the experimental tasks, all participants completed two pretests, as mentioned above: the reading pretest consisted of an excerpt from the practice version of the College-Level Examination Program (a.k.a. CLEP) test for French, while the written pretest consisted of a three-paragraph composition similar in format to Tasks One and Two, but all groups wrote without using an online translator. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed no significant differences among the groups on either measure (p < 0.05), indicating they were statistically similar at the start of the study. To gauge any effect that OT may have had on participant writing after the experimental tasks, all participants also completed a posttest, which like the written pretest involved a three-paragraph composition written without the use of OT. In all, there were 128 compositions (written pretest, Tasks One and Two, and posttest) submitted by participants.

Six English-native GTAs, each with at least 11 years of experience speaking
French and two years of teaching experience, were asked to serve as raters. Raters were asked to read compositions to determine whether, in their opinion, participants used an online translator to aid in writing. One GTA had taught a class in which some of the participants were enrolled, while the other GTAs had not. In order to protect participants’ anonymity, each was assigned a participant number, and personally-identifying information (e.g., names of the participants, friends and family members mentioned in the compositions) was changed to non-identifiable equivalents that did not affect grammaticality. An example of this would be replacing a female name beginning with a vowel by another female name that also started with a vowel so as not to affect adjective agreement or elision. Raters attended a one-hour informational and training session prior to receiving compositions to rate. During this session, they were informed of the design of the study, given a brief history of and an introduction to OT, shown a copy of the strengths and pitfalls of OT that had been provided to study participants (see Appendix C), made aware of additional typographical features, including sudden changes in font or punctuation style, that might indicate OT content was pasted into a composition, and presented with the rubric used for scoring the compositions. In order to increase interrater reliability and ensure that the evaluators were familiar with OT, they then rated four example compositions, judging whether or not they thought a translator had been used for each, and discussed their scores and rationale with the researcher and other raters.

Given the large number of compositions, the ideal of having all raters assess each composition was logistically impossible. Instead, each composition written for the pretest, posttest, and Tasks One and Two was read by two raters. Raters were also asked to indicate, through brief explanations and/or marks (e.g., underlining or circling words), what specifically had led them to conclude that an online translator had or had not been used. Chi-square tests and Likelihood ratios were used to verify interrater reliability. One-way ANOVAs were performed to find statistical differences between the groups and tasks.

**Results**

**Rater Judgments**

A highly significant association \((p < .001)\) was found between raters’ judgment of OT use and actual usage, \(\chi^2 (1) = 28.81\) and Likelihood ratio of 28.13. Likelihood ratios provide a way to compare the actual and expected counts of a measure, in this case estimating the probability that a rater’s judgment on a given composition will match up with actual OT use. Across all compositions, there were 181 correct judgments out of 256, representing a 70.70% accuracy rate. For a majority of cases, instructors were able to identify which compositions were written by participants who were allowed access to an online translator, and which were composed by participants who were not permitted to use OT. Of the times raters were incorrect in their assessment of OT use, there were 33 cases of false positives, that is, where a rater suspected an online translator was used when in fact none was. Additionally, there were 42 cases of false negatives, that is, where a rater did not judge a composition to have been aided by OT when it had been. False negatives represented 16.4% of all judgments, while false positives accounted for 12.9% of cases.
While instructors overwhelmingly were able to recognize which compositions were written with the aid of OT, there were still a notable number of errors. Additional analyses were conducted to pinpoint on which tasks the false positives and negatives occurred. For the written pretest, there was a 73.44% success rate in correctly identifying compositions as not having been written with an online translator. There were 17 false positives out of 64 possible ratings, or a 26.56% error rate. Since no participants were authorized to use a translator for the pretest, there were no false negatives. On the posttest, for which OT was also not allowed, there were 11 false positives out of the 64 ratings, leading to an 82.83% success rate. Only percentages are given for these measures since actual usage was a constant in that all compositions were written without OT. For this reason, it is not possible to obtain chi-squares or Likelihood ratios for the written pretest and posttest because it would involve division by zero.

On Tasks One and Two, the control group (Group A) was not allowed to use OT, while members of Groups B (with no prior training in OT use) and C (with prior training) were instructed in each prompt to use the online translator found at <http://freetranslation.com> to assist them in writing their composition. A highly significant difference ($p < .001$) was found for Task One between rater judgments and actual OT use: $\chi^2 (1) = 14.20$ and Likelihood ratio of 20.09. Raters correctly judged 41 out of 66 compositions overall, representing 64.06% of cases. There were no false positives. Importantly, however, there were 23 false negatives, which means that out of the 44 ratings for compositions written with OT, those submitted by Groups B and C, there was only a 47.73% success rate. Despite the fact that instructors were able to judge OT use or non-use overall to a statistically significant level, the raw data show that there were still many cases in which raters did not detect the use of an online translator when one had actually been used.

For Task Two, a significant association ($p < 0.05$) was again found between judged and actual OT use, with $\chi^2 (1) = 6.398$ and Likelihood ratio of 6.63. Instructors correctly identified 42 out of 64 compositions, for a 65.63% overall success rate. This time, however, there were five false positives and 19 false negatives, indicating once again that raters did not suspect OT use in a number of cases when it had actually been used, 19 out of 44 ratings, or 43.18% of the time. There were a small number of cases for Task Two where translator use was incorrectly suspected by raters, representing five out of 20 ratings, or 25%.

These findings demonstrated that instructors were able to correctly identify whether or not an online translator was used, both overall and on three of the four compositions. For the second writing task, there was still a statistically significant relationship between the judgments of raters and actual OT use, although not highly so. Instructors were rather successful in recognizing compositions where OT was not used, while the data show that they did not fare quite as well with correctly identifying OT when it had been used.

Rater Comments and Samples of Participant Writing

In addition to a binary decision of whether or not an online translator had been used for a given composition, raters were asked to indicate which passages or characteristics in the writing led them to their judgment. Some of these include ty-
pographical features, inappropriate lexical choices not deemed typical for this level, inconsistency in sophistication or accuracy of writing within a composition, misspelled words in English, or spelling or accent mistakes in French appearing in the composition. A brief discussion of a sampling of their comments, both for compositions where OT was used and for ones where there was no online translator involved, will give a more qualitative look at what went into the decision-making process. This discussion should serve as a look at which aspects present in participant compositions might be signs of OT-aided writing and what may not necessarily indicate the use of an online translator.

One feature that raters reported as suggesting OT use was a sudden change in font type or size. Such changes can indicate that text has been copied and pasted from another source, such as an OT site. This typographical change may also lead to noticing differences in writing before or after the inserted texts. For one composition, a rater noted that after the change in font size no missing articles or accents occurred, which helped lead to a correct identification of online translator use for that essay. In another case, the change in font was the main factor that was reported to allow a correct determination of translator use. One of the two raters for this composition commented, “Although I’m not sure if the entire essay was written with the help of a translator, I’m pretty certain that the last paragraph was largely because the font changes.” A sudden change in typographical style was seen as a good indicator that a translator had likely been used during the writing process.

Another aspect cited for arousing suspicion of OT use involved inappropriate grammatical or lexical choices that do not seem typical of student-produced errors. One rater highlighted the following example, *chronométrer consommer*, which literally means *to time to consume* and was apparently intended by the participant to convey the idea of *time-consuming*. The verb *chronométrer*, which might be used when one is talking about timing a race, for example, is the wrong part of speech: a verb in infinitive form instead of a noun. This word is unlikely to be confused semantically with the more general concept of time. *Consommer* is also the wrong word class, an inappropriate semantic choice, and unlikely to be used by a student at this level without the use of an online translator, at least in the judgment of the rater. In another composition where OT use was allowed, a participant wrote *la décision est jusqu’à tu*, literally meaning *the decision is up to/until you*. While *jusqu’à* can mean *up to* in certain contexts, its primary acceptation is *until* in a temporal, numerical, or spatial sense. The rater judged this atypical and incorrect way of conveying the idiomatic use of *jusqu’à* to be OT-produced. Another sentence, *La bonne chance faisant cette grande décision!!*, literally, *The good luck making this big decision!!*, was judged to be indicative of translator use. The presence of the definite article at the beginning of the sentence is ungrammatical both in English and French for this type of exclamation. In addition, the French sentence contains a gerundive, a more rarely used grammatical form in French sometimes corresponding to –*ing* in English, but which is unlikely to have been produced by a student without OT, in the estimation of the rater.

Raters also found inconsistencies in level or accuracy, either between passages within a composition or as compared to typical production for students at the third- and fourth-semester level, which led them to believe an online translator had been used on all or portions of a given composition. There were a few examples of OT-
aided compositions that contained the correct use of the partitive article *de*, which is generally untranslated in English but expresses the idea of *some*, in front of a plural prepositive adjective. One example of this was *de vrais programmes*, meaning *real programs*, in lieu of the regular plural partitive article *des*. This finer grammatical point is one that even not all native French speakers respect, in the researcher’s experience. In one composition, the presence of this feature was coupled with a number of more basic mistakes with accents, for example, *trent* instead of *très* for *very*, as well as with grammar, *je pense que te aimais le travail*, presumably meaning *I think that you would like the job/work*, but with an incorrect subject pronoun and the second verb in the imperfect instead of conditional mood. These inconsistencies helped raters identify the composition as being written at least in part with OT.

In some cases, instructors judging the tasks found usage to be above what a student would be expected to produce at this level, and described a composition’s spelling, accents, or grammar as being, in their words, *too good or perfect* for participants to have produced on their own. For one composition, there were no orthographical errors whatsoever and only one error with accents: *profession* which, as in English, carries no accent. At the same time, other errors occurred, including varied usage for the formal and informal second person subject pronouns, *vous* and *tu*, respectively, and lack of the use of the subjunctive mood, *pour que tu peux choisir*, meaning *so that you can choose* but without the appropriate subjunctive on the first verb. The rater judged these aspects to be signs that the participant used an online translator to help in writing.

Similarly, four of the raters of compositions determined, on at least one of the compositions they judged, that the quality of writing was too poor to have been aided by an online translator. One composition contained orthographical, diacritical, and grammatical errors and was judged to be entirely human produced. One rater, who correctly determined that OT had not been used, marked errors such as *chiox* instead of *choix* for *choice*, *endôit* for *endroit*, meaning *place* in English, the noun *amour* in place of *aime* for the verb *love*; *J'ai ne cher pas* was apparently meant to express *Ce n'est pas cher*, which would be *It's not expensive* in English but with several syntactic and lexical mistakes in French, which obscure the meaning. As seen above, the presence or absence of certain mistakes led raters to their decision concerning possible OT use.

Lastly, one of the *red flags* cited by Luton (2003) also occurred on an OT-aided composition and was noted by a rater: the inclusion of a misspelled word in the writer’s native language. One participant’s composition included the word *recvieve*, presumably a typographical error for *receive*. Since the rest of the composition is written in French and the online translator would not recognize the incorrectly spelled word, this was deemed by the rater to have been run through the translator. The mistake appeared in a composition that also included a number of orthographical and diacritical errors in French, e.g., *meuiller* instead of *meilleur* to mean *best*. This suggests that the participant used OT for select portions of writing, including the misspelled *recvieve*, while composing and making orthographical and other errors in French without the online translator for other parts of the task.

It is important to note, however, that while the above-cited features may be good indicators of OT use, they are not necessarily foolproof ways of determining
whether a student has used a translator while writing. Students could, for example, change the font type or size on their own in word processors, although no such cases were found by raters or the researcher among participants who had not used a translator. Additionally, and more importantly, some variation in production is typical at this level of acquisition, so inconsistency in level or spelling is not necessarily caused by OT use.

One composition that was not written with the aid of an OT included the misspelled proper noun *Illinois* for *Illinois*, likely due to a typing mistake. While in this case the correctly spelled French and English words are identical in orthographical form, one could easily imagine a student mistyping another proper noun where the two languages differ. One example might be typing *Floirda*, misspelled in English, instead of *Floride* in French, and including it on a composition not processed by an online translator. There were also several cases of participants inserting words in English that they assumedly did not know how to say in French, such as *beer* or *accountancy*, whose presence even had they been misspelled would not necessarily indicate OT use but could instead demonstrate incomplete lexical knowledge on the part of the participant. Cases with isolated English words, misspelled or otherwise, may occur where there are orthographical mistakes in English unrelated to OT use and do not definitively indicate that a student relied on an online translator for help in writing.

As mentioned above, there were a number of cases where rater judgments were incorrect concerning OT use. For one composition that was not written with the aid of an online translator, one rater mistakenly thought that one had been used, citing “[s]ome non-native speaker of French errors (e.g. faire les vacances), but also perfect use of the subjunctive ‘pour qu’ils puissent...’.” The second phrase cited, which means *so that they can...*, uses a conjunction that requires the subjunctive mood in French. The subjunctive is a grammatical point that is often more difficult to master; one might expect a student who uses the expression *pour que*, knows that it takes the subjunctive, and can conjugate it correctly, would also know an appropriate expression to talk about vacation such as *faire un voyage*, in English *to take a trip*, or *prendre des vacances*, meaning *to take a vacation*. But the composition in question was written for the posttest, on which online translators were not authorized; the mistakes instead reflected the incomplete acquisition of the language by the composition’s writer. For another composition, both raters underlined *ma grand-mère mais on* (literally, *my grandmother house*) and thought that the incorrect possessive expression (which should be *la maison de ma grand-mère* for *my grandmother’s house*, or *the house of my grandmother*) was a sign of translator use, along and with “nearly perfect” spelling, as one of them put it. The error in expressing possession, however, is not one that *Free Translation* makes; it provides the correct translation in French (SDL, 2012). While the composition did present few spelling errors, other mistakes throughout the composition were indicative of student-produced errors. Two such examples included another difficulty expressing possession, *votre amis* instead of the plural possessive of *vos* at the beginning to mean *your friends*, and using *très* instead of *beaucoup de* to mean *a lot of*.

On the other hand, there were compositions where OT was indeed used but which escaped detection by one or both raters. In some such cases, the presence of errors in some parts of the text appeared to lead raters to discount possible signs
of translator use elsewhere. In one composition, the participant had a number of mistakes in French: for example, *les travaux*, meaning *the jobs* but with an incorrect plural, as well as *à*, or *at*, with an acute instead of a grave accent. Both of these are mistakes that would not be expected of an online translator. However, to talk about a Master's degree, the participant put *degré du maître*, which literally means *degree of the master*, but with both of the nouns incorrect lexical choices in French for this term. One rater specifically expressed the belief that a translator would have found a better translation for *Master's degree*, while another drew boxes around *degré* and *maître* and still judged that the composition was not written with the aid of a translator. In fact, *degré du maître* is the translation that is given by Free Translation for *Master's degree* (SDL, 2012).

In another composition, the participant misspelled several words and made a number of grammatical mistakes that would not appear to be translator-induced. An example of the latter was *bon professeurs*, meaning *good teachers*, but with missing plural agreement on the adjective. Misspelled words included *mone* instead of *mon* for the English *my*, and *beacoup* instead of *beaucoup* for *a lot*. These mistakes led one rater to conclude that no translator had been used. There were however other aspects that were judged to be possibly indicative of the influence of OT. The phrase *mes amis et je suis allé*, literally, *my friends and I went*, contains a subject pronoun instead of the disjunctive/tonic *moi* here, as well as a verb in French agreeing only with the second part of the combined subject; both of these errors are judged by the researcher to be atypical of student production. Other aspects that might suggest OT use include unusual lexical choices such *méchante*, meaning *nasty* as referring to people or animals, to talk instead about cooking, inconsistent spelling and usage on several words, such as the incorrect *ma université* co-occurring with the correct *mon université* for *my university*, and several cases of the preposition *à* (*to/in*) without its accent while it is included in others instances. None of these features alone might be considered definitive proof or *red flags* of OT use, but taken together they were enough for one of the two raters reading the composition to identify it correctly as being written with the aid of an online translator.

It is interesting to note that instructors correctly identified compositions written by Group C, which had training in OT use prior to experimental tasks, more often than those written with OT by Group B. Group C's compositions were correctly identified 31 times out of 44 compared to only 15 out of 44 times for Group B, even though the latter had received no training. Training in OT use did not appear to allow participants who were using an online translator to escape detection, even though as mentioned above, their scores did not suffer as a result, and in some cases were actually higher than those of the control group (O’Neill, 2012).

Overall, raters were able to determine whether or not compositions were written with the use of an online translator. In some cases instructors were able to identify passages or features that aided them in coming to the correct decision. For other compositions, however, raters were unable to determine correctly the presence of OT. Based on rater comments and participant writing samples, some of the incorrect choices may have been due to participants using an online translator for only some portions of the task, or rater opinions on how well or poorly an online translator would perform for certain features as compared to students writing without using a translator.
There were several limitations to the current research that should be noted. The study involved only third- and fourth-semester students from one university who were taking French and who reported having no intention of continuing their French coursework. More research would be needed to see if similar results would apply to other populations, such as students learning other languages or those at other levels, at the university or in K-12. In addition, participants volunteered for the study, which means there may have been a self-selection bias among those who were eager to use OT or who had preconceived attitudes towards online translators. While groups were found to be statistically similar at the start of the study, there were varied backgrounds and experiences represented. For example, there were some participants who had studied or were fluent in other languages besides English, while others had only taken French. Since raters knew that some of the compositions were written with the use of an online translator and that they were reading papers as part of a study on OT, it is possible that raters were less reticent to judge a composition as being written with the help of OT than they might be in a typical setting where there is no assumption that some essays were definitely completed with such aid. Additionally, since it was not feasible to use video recording or capture keystrokes, there was the possibility that participants had access to unauthorized tools; an example of this would be a student who was instructed not to use an online translator but who may have done so. There were, however, no cases found by proctors or the researcher where it appeared a participant had used an online translator when not permitted, and no participant mentioned doing so in written self-reports describing their writing and OT use.

In future research, it is recommended that participant input be recorded through video camera, screen recordings, or keystroke captures both to ensure that students do not access unauthorized materials and to get more detailed data about how students use OT. Such an approach would provide insight into a number of areas, including how often students accept or reject the output of the online translator, at what points in the writing process OT is used, and for what purposes the translator is used (e.g., to look up an individual lexical item or to check grammatical structures). Delayed posttests could help determine what long term effects, if any, using OT might have on student writing or acquisition; such results could help inform teachers looking for traces of OT use, or help teach to design lessons that effectively utilize online translators to illustrate certain linguistic features or concepts. Additionally, online translators might be compared with other language tools, such as paper or electronic dictionaries, phone or tablet applications, to measure the effects of various resources both on overall scores as well as on specific features of student writing.

**Discussion**

The research question that guided this study was answered affirmatively. That is, in the majority of the cases instructors were in fact able to distinguish compositions written with the help of an online translator from those written without OT aid. While these results were statistically significant, a closer look at the quantitative and qualitative data does not support the assumption that students using an online translator produce compositions that can always be easily identified. In nearly 30%
of the evaluations, compositions were grouped incorrectly. Although more research is needed, the findings indicate that students do not necessarily perform perceptibly differently when using an online translator, which raises the question of how much harm or help OT are actually providing to students in the short and long terms.

There are a number of features suggesting an online translator may have been used that can help guide instructors in their determination of online translator use among students. Knowing what features may be characteristic of OT in student writing may be useful in identifying possible infractions of policies that discourage use of OT on ethical grounds, or out of a concern OT tools might harm long-term language acquisition by students. This research provided a look at student compositions written with the use of an online translator, not necessarily to encourage or discourage its use, but to gain an understanding of how student writing with OT compares to that done without a translator. More research is needed to investigate how often these errors occur and to what extent they can be reliably identified as stemming from translator use as opposed to typical student production.

As information technology continues to develop, more language-related resources are becoming available to the general public and our students. It is important that language teachers and administrators make informed decisions concerning policies related to technologies whose use has not always been fully explored in the literature or in the field. Such determinations should strike a balance between pedagogical, administrative, and ethical concerns. Online translation is one such technology of which many teachers and students alike are aware, but for which the potential benefits or pitfalls are not fully known.

The finding that raters in this study were not always able to identify OT-assisted writing, and occasionally misjudged compositions as being written with an online translator, has important implications for the classroom. If the results obtained can be applied more broadly, then there are likely cases where students are submitting work that was written, at least in part, with the aid of an online translator without the instructor realizing it. For teachers or departments that impose sanctions against online translators, this means that some students may be using unauthorized materials without the instructor’s knowledge. Given that prior research focusing on OT showed that scores for those using a translator were not lower than, and in some cases were actually higher than, those for participants not using a translator (O’Neill, 2012), it is possible that some students deviating from academic policy are receiving better grades than those who follow it. In other cases, some students may be assigned a lower grade or be accused of cheating on compositions for which an online translator was not in fact used. None of these outcomes is desirable from an instructional or administrative point of view.

The results of the current study suggest a number of possible avenues of further research. Future studies could attempt to find answers to questions such as does OT use by students result in long-term effects on their composition writing? Additionally, does the total number of errors, both overall and for specific linguistic features, differ between compositions written with OT and those written without? Further research could also investigate whether teacher-led lessons featuring online translators can be effective in either curbing their use or raising student awareness about what sorts of effects, be they negative or positive, OT use may have on their language
production. It is possible that OT may in some cases foster student achievement, or it may conversely hinder student learning. Similar discussions occurred with the advent of electronic calculators, which are now commonplace in many math classrooms for certain types of tasks. What to do about online translator use among language learners is an issue that is not easy to navigate, but that is nonetheless currently facing many foreign language instructors and administrators.

References


Appendices

All appendices for this article may be viewed by visiting the following URL: http://tinyurl.com/ONeillDimension2013
Encouraging TAs to Embrace Communicative Language Teaching: An Investigation of Pre-service Training Practices

Paula Garrett-Rucks  
Georgia State University

Kerri McCoy  
Autrey Mill Middle School

Abstract

This article begins by synthesizing research findings concerning the increasingly important role graduate student teaching assistants (TAs) play in fostering undergraduate learners’ oral proficiency. Despite this important role, our review of TA training practices in the literature found a lack of research on the preparation TAs receive prior to beginning their foreign language instruction. Accordingly, the present study examines incoming TAs’ perceptions of their command of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) techniques presented at an interdepartmental, pre-service orientation at a large Midwestern research university. Using a qualitative approach, we investigated the unique ways in which this orientation influenced novice and experienced TAs differently in the analysis of thirteen focus participants’ semi-structured interviews. The discussion speaks to the critical elements of the pre-service orientation that appeared to promote TAs’ appropriation of various aspects of CLT as well as the tenets of CLT that remained neglected by the majority of the focus participants. The pedagogical implications address ways to maximize CLT training and extend beyond pre-service TA orientations to K-12 teacher training programs and workshops.

Recent studies on the reasons why students pursue world language study repeatedly report learners’ desire to gain proficiency in the language in order to communicate with members of the target culture (Hoyt-Oukada, 2003; HusseinAli, 2006; Murphy, Magnan, Back, & Garrett-Rucks, 2009; Ossipov, 2000; Yang, 2003). Communicative language teaching (CLT) meets the proficiency desires expressed by learners by preparing students for target language (TL) use in real-world situations. However, foreign language (FL) educators who have not been trained in the communicative approach risk using outdated methodologies, reducing the likelihood that their learners will gain a strong sense of oral proficiency. Students who are not satisfied with the outcome of their early FL learning experiences—due to their lack of ability to communicate in the target language—are less likely to continue their FL studies (Murphy et al., 2009). This is of particular concern given the 2009 Modern Language Association Enrollment Survey that reports that only about 20% of FL


students in commonly taught languages—Spanish, French, and German—are enrolled in advanced courses at higher education institutions, leaving the vast majority of students enrolled in first- and second-year classes (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2010). Graduate student teaching assistants (TAs) play a critical role in encouraging university students to continue their FL studies because universities with graduate degree programs increasingly rely on TAs to teach their introductory FL classes (Kost, 2008).

Despite the important role FL TAs serve as advocates for world language programs, many TAs begin their FL instruction with limited training. With an emphasis on commonly taught languages, TA training reported in the literature typically consists of a brief pre-service orientation, followed by a semester-long teaching methods course during the TAs’ first-semester of teaching (Kost, 2008). In a study of FL TAs’ perceptions of their training, Brandl (2000) found that many novice TAs considered fall orientation training programs more beneficial than their methods classes, which he speculated may be due to “the immediate necessity to learn whatever it takes to get ready for their teaching assignments” (p. 366). Due to scheduling, many TAs start teaching prior to the start of their Methods course, subsequently relying solely on the information provided in the pre-service orientation for their first few days of instruction. Regardless of the importance of the pre-service orientation, there exists a lacuna in the literature of studies investigating TA pre-service training, particularly with attention to the aspects of the orientation that appear to encourage TAs to embrace CLT practices. Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to contribute to the understanding of how to maximize FL teacher training methods, especially pre-service TA training practices, by investigating the ways in which TAs believed they would incorporate CLT practices into their own teaching after attending a pre-service orientation.

Using a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2003) to derive meaning from 13 TA participants’ experiences, represented in semi-structured interviews with the first author following the pre-service orientation, we identified the unique ways in which novice and experienced TAs appropriated aspects of CLT practices from the orientation. Despite the emphasis on pre-service TA training in this paper, the pedagogical implications extend to K-12 FL teacher training programs and district coordinator workshops, as well as to novice and experienced FL educators who are interested in brushing up their understanding of CLT practices.

Review of the Literature

In a communicative curriculum, classes center on meaningful experiences in the language through contextualized TL use rather than learning about the language through lengthy grammar explanations. The communicative approach to FL instruction emphasizes the communication of meaning in believable interactions in a variety of communicative settings, essentially preparing learners for real-life situations with speakers of the target language. Informed by research in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, the communicative approach emphasizes TL instruction, ideally contextualized through the use of authentic texts, role-play, or audiovisuals such as props, drawings, or movement (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Expanding Krashen’s (1982) notion that oral proficiency is primarily acquired
Encouraging TAs to Embrace Communicative Language Teaching

by exposure to comprehensible input, Swain’s Output Hypothesis (1985) greatly influenced the communicative approach to FL instruction by emphasizing the importance of learner language production in addition to comprehensible TL exposure. To encourage learner output, supporters of CLT believe error correction should be limited in the earliest stages of second language learning to avoid stifling learners’ motivation to communicate “by an insistence on correctness” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 140). Rather, learners’ errors are considered “a natural and valuable part of the language learning process” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 140). Widely promoted by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, CLT is the most prevalent FL teaching method found today. Nonetheless, TAs not been trained in CLT prior to their instruction risk perpetuating outmoded styles of teaching and limiting their students’ sense of oral proficiency. This is of particular concern due to the aforementioned role of TAs as gatekeepers for advanced studies in world language programs.

In recent times, preparing TAs to teach the language they are studying at the graduate level has become valued by many as a crucial component of their professional development in addition to improving their effectiveness as a TA (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Byrnes, 2001; Schulz, 2000). According to Schulz (2000), research on FL graduate student training heightened in the early 1990s with the appearance of the American Association of University Supervisors and Coordinators annual volumes on research in language program direction and TA professional development. In the last 20 years, at least four of the volumes dealt specifically with matters of TA training, providing research findings and suggestions to conceptualize the development of graduate students in FL departments. Kost (2008) claims that the most prevalent model of FL TA training typically consists of a pre-service orientation workshop—just before the first semester of graduate school begins—followed by a methodology course during TAs’ first semester of graduate school.

Although the literature suggests that FL TA training is common at research universities, little is known about the training practices that occur. For example, the 2007 Modern Language Association report urged departments to “Enhance and reward graduate student training in languages and in language teaching” (Modern Language Association, 2007, p. 8), but it lacked direction on how to instruct graduate students beyond suggestions to “teach graduate students to use technology in language instruction and learning” (p. 8). Moreover, there is even less specific guidance in the literature in the pre-service TA training component, which essentially introduces FL TAs to CLT as the exemplar instructional approach prior to their Methods course. In the following section, we provide an overview of four types of TA training practices described in the literature: (1) a descriptive study (Amores, 1999) of Spanish graduate student TA training at the University of West Virginia (UWV); (2) an empirical study (Brandl, 2000) investigating individual and group TA training practices across five departments at the University of Washington (UW); (3) an empirical study (Kost, 2008) investigating the general effectiveness of an apprenticeship program for all incoming graduate students into the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta (UA); (4) a position paper (Byrnes, 2001) making a case for a comprehensive model of TA preparation that emphasizes research-based understandings of pedagogy found at the German Department of
Admittedly, TA training practices are varied and continually evolve. The information presented in the following review is intended to document a sampling of university FL training programs represented solely at the time of the publication date and only in the language departments specified.

Pre-service TA training is required at the UWV, UW, UA, and Georgetown. At UWV, Amores (1999) described the week-long pre-service workshop as “designed to provide new GTAs [graduate student TAs] with the theoretical bases and practical information they need in order to carry out their responsibilities in the classroom” (p. 443). The Spanish Department orientation workshop provides TAs with information about textbooks, course syllabi, lesson plans, ideas about how to motivate students, administer performance assessments, and administrative duties such as grade-keeping, as well as activities for the first few days of class. TAs also attend a session on maintaining TL use in the classroom and a first-day teaching demonstration of a French class, presumably a less-familiar language for many of the Spanish TAs. Brandl (2000) did not describe UW’s pre-service orientations in his article, yet he did mention that the participants in his study who came from five language departments—Asian, Germanics, Romance (Spanish Division), Scandinavian, and Slavic—found their departmental fall orientations very useful. At the UA, Kost (2008) described the mandatory fall pre-service orientation for all incoming graduate students into the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies as consisting of two days of training for all languages in the department and one day of language-specific workshops. In addition to the pre-service workshop and fall semester Methods course, incoming graduate students with no previous teaching experience are funded as apprentices at the UA in order to “provide incoming graduate students with the opportunity to gain day-to-day teaching experience in the classroom under the guidance of a more experienced instructor” (p. 31). At Georgetown, TAs in the German Department take a FL Methods course during the first semester of graduate study prior to any instruction (Byrnes, 2001), thus a fall pre-service workshop is unnecessary. Interestingly, novice TAs at Georgetown take a second graduate-level class to further explore teaching and learning issues when they begin teaching during their second semester of graduate study. Both the UWV and the UW offer only one Methods course taken during TAs’ first semester of instruction that is intended to train TAs further in CLT.

As noted by Amores (1999), delaying the teaching assignments of TAs until their second semester, after they have completed the Methods course, would be much more desirable, but the staffing needs that would result at most research universities would be “cost-prohibitive” (p. 444). As a result, few TAs receive training on FL instruction prior to their first day of class beyond what is provided in the pre-service orientation. Despite the importance of the pre-service orientation in preparing the majority of incoming TAs for their first-semester of instruction, few studies have investigated the aspects of such orientations that encourage TAs to embrace CLT. This is precisely the goal of the current study.

The Study

The aim of this research is to explore the influences of a CLT pre-service orientation workshop at a large Midwestern university on graduate student TAs’ percep-
tions of their command of CLT techniques. Influenced by previous research (Brandl, 2000) that found differences between the training preferences of novice TAs and those with prior teaching experience, the researchers investigated the ways in which novice and experienced TAs differ in their perceptions of their command of CLT after a pre-service orientation workshop. The following questions are intended to inform this overarching question:

1. In what ways do novice and experienced TAs imagine themselves teaching differently prior to and then after the orientation?
2. In what ways do novice and experienced TAs accept or question the effectiveness of CLT after the workshop?
3. In what ways are novice and experienced TAs confident or not confident in their ability to teach with the communicative approach after the workshop?

Data used in the present study are taken from a larger study intended to understand TA perceptions of the influences on their instruction over the course of a semester including the pre-service TA orientation, Methods classes, workshops, observations, and student evaluations at the end of the semester. The present study focuses only on the influences of the pre-service orientation on TAs’ perceptions of CLT immediately after the pre-service TA orientation.

Methods

Description of the Pre-service TA Orientation

In the fall of 2010, over 60 TAs who were beginning their graduate studies at a large Midwestern research university attended a mandatory interdepartmental pre-service TA orientation sponsored by seven departments and the university’s Language Institute (see Appendix A for the specific language departments in the informational letter sent to incoming TAs). The interdepartmental orientation lasted three days and consisted of lectures on SLA theory and research that inform CLT methods, professional CLT demonstrations, practice micro-teaching sessions, hereafter referred to as micro-teaches, and brief presentations by Study Abroad and TA Union representatives.

On the first day of orientation, TAs attended a brief lecture on CLT and a French teaching demonstration (demo) that modeled how to work with vocabulary within the context of short conversations by a FL teaching methods professor. For meta-instructional comments on the application of pedagogical theories and practices modeled in the demo, the professor switched from French instruction to English. Next, a Japanese professor modeled a vocabulary-focused lesson taught exclusively in the TL, scaffolding her instruction with drawings and realia. Prior to her instruction, the professor first contextualized the activity in English: The planning of an international student welcome party in Japan. She then asked the TA “students” to perform a communicative activity by asking food and drink preferences of their “classmates” to determine what to serve at the party using the Japanese equivalent of “Do you like ...?”

After the first lecture and teaching demos concluded, the TAs were assigned to pre-arranged small groups of six to seven people. The groupings deliberately includ-
ed TAs who would be teaching a variety of languages in order to afford the experience of teaching “students” who do not know the language, as well as the experience of being a novice learner again within the same session. TAs were provided micro-teach instructions and guidelines (see Appendix B1) to teach a 10-minute session about vocabulary in context the following day. TAs were informed that they would be provided feedback immediately after each micro-teach in the form of group discussions mediated by a faculty member and an experienced TA who had previously taught in a university FL program. In addition to public comments, TAs also received brief peer comments written down on index cards noting strong points of the lesson and suggestions for improvement after their lessons.

On the second day of the orientation, the TAs reconvened to attend a lecture on SLA theories and research influencing FL grammar instruction in CLT in order to prepare for their second micro-teach. A Japanese teaching demo followed. Expanding upon the international party context of the previous day, the Japanese instructor explained the communicative activity that the TAs were ultimately to perform: Introduce themselves, ask the food and drink preferences of their partner, and then offer him or her the desired food and drink. The interdepartmental TA training orientation ended on the third day, after the TA-led, grammar-focused micro-teaches. In addition to this interdepartmental orientation, many departments organized their own course section meetings with language-specific break-out sessions, library tours, and departmental social gatherings during this orientation week. However, for some of the smaller FL departments, this interdepartmental training may have been all that they provided their TAs.

Participants and Procedures

The 13 participants in this study—three males and 10 females between the ages of 21 and 30-years old volunteered to be interviewed immediately after the orientation and prior to their first day teaching. Of these 13 TAs, six were experienced — either having served as the primary teacher in a K-16 FL classroom or holding a degree to perform in this capacity, and seven were novice — having no prior FL teaching experience. There were six Spanish TAs (three novice and three experienced) and seven French TAs (four novice and three experienced). Five of the 13 TAs were international (two French, one Swiss, one Spanish, and one Peruvian) and eight TAs were from the U.S. The majority of the TAs were teaching introductory language courses (first- and second-semester), and only experienced TAs were teaching second year courses (third-semester). TA participant descriptions are found in Table 1 below.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>FL Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Degree Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TA1</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>2 years high school</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>SLA/French-Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA2</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>French M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA3</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>French M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA4</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>French M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA5</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Public Policy M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA6</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>FL teacher training (France)</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Exchange, non-degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA7</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>FL teacher training (Switzerland)</td>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td>Exchange, non-degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA8</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>FL teacher training (U.S.) + 3 years university TA</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Spanish Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA9</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1.5 years private high school</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Spanish Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA10</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Spanish M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA11</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Spanish M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA12</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Peruvian</td>
<td>Spanish M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA13</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>7 years, university TA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>SLA/ Spanish Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first author invited all incoming French- and Spanish-language TAs to participate in the study to discuss their teaching professional development in three 15-minute interviews over the course of the semester. Only French and Spanish TAs were invited to participate in the study due to their departmental mandatory FL Methods course requirements. All of the interviews were recorded by the first author and then transcribed by both authors. Because the present study solely investigates the pre-service orientation portion of the TA training, only the analysis of the first interviews is included. The first semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C for interview protocol) centered on TAs’ previous teaching experiences (question 1), the ways in which the TAs imagined the workshop had influenced their instruction (questions 2 and 3), and the elements of the workshop TAs’ perceived as useful (questions 4 through 6). The transcript analysis of participant responses to these six questions is described in the following section.

Data Analysis

The first author started the content analysis of the interview transcripts using line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2006) to identify TA comments about teaching, including self-images of their teaching and any comments pertaining to CLT (e.g., teaching in the TL, making their TL use comprehensible, contextualizing vocabulary and grammatical features in real-life scenarios, avoiding lengthy grammatical explanations in English, emphasizing learner language production, and limiting learner error correction). Both authors independently analyzed the coded transcripts and compared their interpretations of TA comments into YES or NO categories needed.
to respond to the three research questions; 1) TAs’ initial self-image of their teaching matched CLT before compared to after the workshop, 2) TAs’ acceptance of CLT and 3) TAs’ confidence in their ability to use CLT in their instruction. For example, if a TA had expressed that he had not initially pictured himself teaching in the TL prior to the orientation, but that he now understands the importance of TL instruction, he would be categorized into a NO category for initial self-image of his teaching matching CLT and a YES category for his acceptance of CLT. Both authors met for peer checks to discuss their yes/no categorization of TAs for each of the three research questions based on the TAs’ statements in the transcripts. No differences in interpretation occurred. The first author further analyzed the transcripts of the interviews, seeking novice and experienced TA statements that provided further insight to the influences from the workshop on TAs’ perceptions of CLT.

**Findings**

Figure 1 below provides an overview of the participants’ perceptions of CLT reported by the thirteen TAs interviewed after the pre-service workshop. Individual TA comments are indentified by the TA number referred to in Table A above. The majority of the participants (10 out of 13) reported a difference between how they had imagined themselves teaching prior to the workshop compared to after it. The three TAs (TA1, TA8, and TA13) who reported no difference in their imagined teaching style all had some prior CLT training and teaching experience. The majority of the participants (11 out of 13) appeared to accept the CLT practices promoted at the workshop; only two participants—one novice (TA6) and one experienced (TA9)—questioned the effectiveness of certain aspects of CLT during the interviews. The majority of the participants (nine out of 13) also appeared confident in their ability to teach with the communicative approach after the workshop, and only four participants—two novice (TA5 and TA12) and two experienced (TA6 and TA9)—expressed any type of concern with their ability to teach using this approach during the interviews.

The differences found between experienced and novice TAs’ perceptions toward CLT after they attended the orientation are described in more detail in the following section.

![Figure 1: TA Perceptions of CLT applied to their own teaching practice.](image-url)
Novice and Experienced TAs’ Perceived Teaching Changes after the Orientation

In response to the first research question regarding the ways novice and experienced TAs imagine themselves teaching differently prior to and then after the orientation, only the experienced TAs with prior CLT training (TA1, TA8, TA12) imagined themselves teaching using the techniques taught in the workshop prior to the orientation. The most salient feature related to CLT found in the transcripts was that the majority of the novice TAs did not imagine themselves teaching in the TL prior to the workshops. For example, one novice TA (TA4) reported that she had imagined herself teaching in English prior to the workshop because of her own experiences taking an introductory Spanish class at the university level, which was mostly taught in English. After the workshop, she was eager to teach her introductory French class in the TL from the first class in order to “get the students to have an idea of how class is going to be” (TA4). On the contrary, another novice TA (TA11) who did have exposure to TL instruction in her own beginning studies of Spanish had also imagined herself teaching in English prior to the workshop. She explained that despite her early exposure to TL instruction in high school, “for some reason it seemed overwhelming to teach that way” (TA11). She described how the micro-teaches in the workshop encouraged her to teach in the TL as follows:

After physically doing it [TL teaching] two days in a row [during the micro-teaches at the workshop], I found that it is definitely not that hard. You can make yourself clear through body language, through certain signals you give them—it [TL instruction] is attainable and should be done (TA11).

In addition to holding a changed impression of her own teaching after the workshop, it also appears that this TA has accepted TL instruction by her statement that it “should be done.”

It is interesting to note that the three experienced TAs with no prior CLT training (TA6, TA7, TA9) also portrayed their lack of TL use as well as an emphasis on grammar explanations in their instruction in the same way as the novice TAs had depicted their imagined self-image of their teaching prior to the orientation. For example, an experienced TA described his realization that he had previously emphasized grammar and not TL communication in his teaching as follows:

I felt pretty good about my teaching experiences until I took the orientation […]. I thought [before the orientation] that we could not teach students to be fluent in the classroom… I was very effective at teaching my students to be masters of understanding the mechanics of language…but they were not great communicators (TA9).

However, he explained that the professional teaching demos and micro-teaches were helpful in making him believe that the students can understand TL instruction when given the appropriate support, and that he now understands the importance of fostering student language production.

The experienced TAs who had prior CLT training (TA1, TA8, TA13) had not only imagined themselves teaching in the same way as the methods modeled in the orientation—contextualized TL instruction and student-centered language production activities—but they appeared to notice detailed aspects of CLT promoted in the
workshop. For example, one experienced TA (TA1) noticed how to deal with student grammar questions in a better way than she had previously by responding briefly in English then offering multiple contextualized TL examples. The three experienced TAs with no prior CLT training, as well as all seven novice TAs, appeared to notice general CLT tenets such as teaching in the TL (all 10 TAs), avoiding lengthy grammatical explanations in English (all 10 TAs), placing the emphasis of their instruction on the learner’s language production (TA2, TA3, TA4, TA6, TA7, TA9, TA10, TA12), making the TL comprehensible (TA6, TA7, TA9, TA10, TA11, TA12), and contextualizing vocabulary and grammatical features in real-life scenarios (TA5, TA7, TA9). It is interesting to note that none of the TAs, neither novice nor experienced, mentioned error correction in their descriptions of how they would teach after attending the workshop.

Novice and Experienced TAs’ Acceptance of CLT

In response to the second research question, the ways novice and experienced TAs accept or question CLT after the workshop, the majority of the novice and experienced TAs alike (11 out of 13) appeared to accept CLT practices stating their readiness to emulate CLT in their own instruction or explicitly stating their understanding of why immersion in the TL seemed beneficial. Only two participants, one international novice TA (TA5) and one U.S. experienced TA (TA9) with no prior CLT training, explicitly questioned one aspect of CLT—the use of TL instruction. The U.S. experienced TA (TA9) with no prior CLT training questioned the feasibility of creating positive student-teacher relationships with TL instruction. He further expressed his personal belief that college-aged students would benefit from explicit grammar instruction more than young learners. However, he explained that the professional teaching demos and micro-teaches were “super effective” in making him believe that the students can understand TL instruction when given the appropriate support, and that he thinks it is important to provide students “the opportunity to express themselves” (TA9).

The other TA who questioned the merits of CLT, an international novice TA (TA5), simply believed that explicit grammar instruction made FL learning easier for students. She explained that this is how she learned English, and that it made sense to her to perpetuate this style. The rest of the participants, both novice and experienced TAs without CLT training, either seemed to relate TL instruction to immersion experiences where they improved their own language skills or they were impressed with their own recall of an unfamiliar language, per the Japanese instruction on the second day teaching demo. No concerns about other aspects of CLT—contextualized grammar and vocabulary lessons in real-life scenarios or limited error correction—were expressed.

Novice and Experienced TAs’ Confidence in their Ability to Use CLT

In response to the third research question, the ways novice and experienced TAs are confident or not confident in their ability to teach with the communicative approach after the workshop, previous CLT training and TAs’ nationality were the influential factors detected. The three experienced TAs with prior CLT training (TA1, TA8, TA13) all expressed confidence in their ability to teach with the communicative approach. The four participants who did not feel completely confident in their abil-
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ity to use CLT in their instruction were three international TAs—two novices (TA5, TA12) and one experienced (TA6)—and a U.S. experienced TA (TA9) with no prior CLT training. The U.S. experienced TA (TA9) felt confident in his ability to foster student language production, but was concerned that making the TL comprehensible for his students would take a lot more energy than focusing on explicit grammar explanations. All three international TAs seemed primarily concerned about their teacher identity—as appearing overly energetic or not serious—and also sounding repetitive in their native language instruction. For one of the novice international TAs (TA12), having a second opportunity to do a micro-teach helped reduce his anxiety about sounding too repetitive in his native language instruction. He described his first micro-teach as “very bad” because “no one knew what to do and I did not know what to do about it” (TA12). He described his preoccupation with sounding repetitive in the first micro-teach and the influence of the second teaching demo on a change in his own second micro-teach as follows:

The first one [micro-teach], I was more concerned about myself, and …I didn’t want to repeat that much, I felt like a clown. But the second day, because of this second Japanese class impacted me […] I was repeating and repeating. It was very great (TA12).

For this TA, it was important to have exposure to two days of teaching demos and two micro-teaching experiences to overcome his preconceptions of what FL instruction should look like and to learn how to make the TL more comprehensible for his students.

Contrary to the four aforementioned TAs, the majority of the TAs appeared confident in their ability to use the CLT methods demonstrated in the orientation stating that they felt, “very supported, like my hands are being held a little bit before you take the training wheels off” (TA3), or “I am not concerned about finding ways to teach because there are mentors and resources” (TA11), or “I feel spoon-fed” (TA7) or “I now feel I know how to prepare a class” (TA4).

Overall, the analysis of the interview transcripts suggests that all of the TA participants in this study, both novice and experienced, were persuaded to use at least some aspects of CLT in their own classrooms after attending the orientation. Prior CLT training appeared to separate the views of the TAs in this study more than prior teaching experience. The three TAs with prior CLT training did not express great changes in the self-image they held about their teaching after the workshop; however, after the orientation, the ten other TAs had gained a greater sense of the communicative approach to teaching. It is interesting to note that all ten of the TAs without prior CLT training had imagined themselves teaching about the language in English, rather than emphasizing TL use in the classroom. In addition, the majority of these TAs (eight out of ten) also described the importance of emphasizing learners’ language production in their instruction and making the TL comprehensible (six out of ten). However, only three of the ten TAs who were not previously trained in CLT noted contextualizing vocabulary and grammatical features in real-life scenarios, and none of the TAs mentioned error correction in their descriptions of how they would teach after attending the workshop.
Discussion

Identifying Critical Elements to Promote CLT in TA Pre-Service Training

The pre-service orientation is considered a common component of TA training (Kost, 2008), but as summarized in the review of the literature, considerable differences exist among universities regarding their pre-service training practices. The current investigation of an interdepartmental TA pre-service orientation found the professional CLT demos followed by TA-led micro-teaches valuable for the majority of the TAs, novice and experienced alike. Recall that the first professional teaching demos in this study were of both French and Japanese lessons. The French teaching demo provided TAs meta-instructional comments in English to explain CLT techniques such as contextualizing lessons in real-life scenarios, encouraging learner language production, making TL instruction comprehensible, and avoiding learner error correction when the meaning of their message was comprehensible. The Japanese teaching demo provided TAs with a first-hand opportunity to experience the ways in which an instructor can make the TL comprehensible. Furthermore, having a second day of instruction in Japanese, with the focus on grammar since the necessary vocabulary had been presented during the first session, seemed crucial in promoting these TAs’ acceptance of CLT techniques. Several of the TAs expressed surprise at how much Japanese they had not only retained, but could also produce in the subsequent contextualized grammar lesson demo. Most importantly, the majority of the TAs in this study stated that the teaching demos provided invaluable modeling to inform their understanding of the expectations of their own micro-teaches. The most salient feature from the teaching demos reported by TAs was how to make the TL comprehensible to their students through body language, signals, cognates, and the use of images. These strategies were further modeled in the micro-teaching sessions where TAs were intentionally grouped so as to have multiple languages represented thereby deepening the understanding of how to contextualize and visually support unfamiliar languages by trial and error.

In this study, the two TA-led micro-teaches further fostered the TAs’ appropriation of CLT techniques. It is noteworthy that having two micro-teach opportunities seemed essential to several of the TAs, particularly to the novice TAs who felt their first lessons were not successful. Recall the description of TA12’s heightened attention to details in the second Japanese teaching demo after his self-perceived failed first micro-teach. Similar to Swain’s (1985) Output Hypothesis that describes the way in which L2 learners notice gaps during their language production that subsequently heighten their attention to input, the micro-teaches in this pre-service orientation afforded the TAs an opportunity to notice a gap between their perceptions of CLT from the professional demos and their own teaching performances. After noticing gaps in the first micro-teach, the TAs had the opportunity to apply strategies they had noticed in the second Japanese teaching demo in their own second micro-teach with reported success.

The majority of the TAs in this study stated that the pre-service orientation was influential on their command of certain aspects of CLT. Admittedly, the influence of the orientation on the TAs’ self-reports described in this study may be unique to these participants. It is possible that the participants may have been more willing or
motivated to express their acceptance of CLT techniques because they volunteered to participate in this study, or because they knew they were being interviewed by a researcher who was a French course lecturer, and consequently affiliated with the university language coordinators at the time of the study. In addition, this study only reports TAs’ anticipated vision of their teaching prior to entering the classroom as an instructor. Future research with a semester-long follow-up, including classroom observations of TAs’ instruction would help elucidate the findings in this study. Yet, despite these limitations, this study corroborates previous research (Brandl, 2000) suggesting that TAs not trained in CLT would most likely continue to teach with methods that do not emphasize the communicative approach, such as explicit grammar instruction with a lack of TL use. Moreover, findings from this study uphold the results of a comparative TA training study (Chambers & Pearson, 2004) where TAs with supported access to modern FL lessons reported more self-confidence in their teaching than those without such training.

Although this study contributes to filling the gap in the literature concerning pre-service TA training by investigating TAs’ impressions of their global command of CLT after the pre-service training, it is important to note that the majority of TAs spoke primarily about TL use in their instruction. It is alarming to note that several of the TAs’ descriptions of their imagined teaching styles after the orientation lacked primary principles of CLT—emphasizing learner language production in student-centered classroom activities, contextualizing grammatical features in real-life scenarios, and minimizing learner error correction. There is a need for future research to explicitly address these important aspects of CLT and to further elucidate the effectiveness of additional pre-service TA training practices. It is possible that CLT review seminars over the course of the semester are needed to expand TAs understanding of additional dimensions of CLT. As noted by Brandl (2000), it takes time and experience for TAs to “process, apply, and synthesize” (p. 366) pedagogical theory and methods. Furthermore, ongoing interdepartmental CLT seminars would provide TAs from language groups who do not have the benefit of a Methods course with a review of what they had been taught during the three-day workshop. TAs from language groups with Methods classes, such as the French and Spanish groups in this study, would also benefit from a CLT refresher seminar to reinforce the information studied in their Methods classes in a continued mixed venue of multiple languages and cultures as deemed valuable by TAs in this study. Similarly, in the K-12 setting, district-wide CLT-focused professional development workshops among mixed FL group instructors could be beneficial, and provide fodder for additional research into CLT training techniques.

In conclusion, there is a tremendous need to understand best-practice pre-service TA training as TAs are becoming increasingly responsible for undergraduate FL instruction. With only 20 percent of students continuing to advanced levels of FL instruction in major research universities, we cannot deny the important role TAs play in world language programs in attracting FL learners to continue their study. Research findings continually report FL learners’ desire to gain proficiency in the language in order to communicate with target culture members (Husseinali, 2006; Murphy et al. 2009; Ossipov, 2000; Yang, 2003). TAs play a key role in influencing language learners’ affective experience with language learning and sustaining learn-
ers’ motivation for further language study. Therefore, this study maintains that the extent to which TAs are able to address learners’ needs and interests related to real-life communicative skills depends largely upon the their effective implementation of CLT, an instructional approach that addresses learners’ interests. Accordingly, the importance of equipping TAs with CLT-training prior to the very first day of instruction, as well as with ongoing support in the use of CLT, cannot be understated.

The implications of these findings can be extended beyond TA training programs to K-12 FL teacher preparation programs as well as FL teacher continuing education. The findings show that novice and experienced FL instructors alike can benefit from workshops revisiting the tenets of CLT. In addition to encouraging FL instructors to embrace CLT techniques, well-designed training can boost an instructor’s self-confidence and self-efficacy as a teacher, and as noted by Chambers and Pearson (2004), “an effective TA is a confident TA and confidence has much to do with competence” (p. 32).

Endnotes
1 See http://prucks.edublogs.org/ for Appendices

References


Evaluating Effective Teaching in the 21st Century World Language Classroom

Christina Huhn
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Abstract

Stronge, Ward, and Grant (2011) emphasize the fundamental need to evaluate the teaching that occurs in our classrooms. They add that in order to effect change in the quality of our education, we must continue to investigate what constitutes effective teaching as it has significant implications for both the education of and assessment of teachers and their students. In West Virginia, what occurs in world language (WL) classrooms has been the topic of ongoing discussions between members of the state foreign language teachers association, current teachers, and the state’s WL coordinators. Despite notable positive momentum in WL education in the state, scant data existed that would provide knowledge of the practices of WL teachers. The present research revealed that while teachers incorporate a variety of appropriate activities into their classroom, and both believe in the value of the standards and use them in planning their lessons, their implementation of standards-based assessments lag behind. The findings also hint at the similarity to the findings from the recent ACTFL Standards Impact Survey (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, ACTFL, 2011) with respect to how teachers nationwide interpret and incorporate the standards and standards-based assessment in their classrooms.

Background

Given the currently accepted pedagogical focus on communicative, student-centered approaches to instruction, a current world language (WL) classroom must be more than grammatical instruction and textbook-driven practice. In West Virginia, issues of teacher language proficiency, components of effective teaching, and whether or not effective teaching occurs in current classrooms have been the topic of ongoing discussions between members of the West Virginia Foreign Language Teachers Association (WVFLTA), current WL teachers, and the state’s WL coordinators. These informal conversations provided the impetus to examine the actual practices of teachers in West Virginia’s WL classrooms.

Although all states are experiencing educational and financial challenges, the ongoing development of a 21st Century educational system in West Virginia is further complicated by the state’s demographics, which have been found to be a contributive factor in the shortage of language teachers (Swanson & Huff, 2010). In addition to limited financial means, the average annual household income is $38,380...
as compared to the U.S. average of $51,194. Additionally, West Virginia is rather homogenous given that 2.3% of the state’s residents speak a language other than English in the home compared to the US average, 20.1% (U.S. Census, 2012). Additionally, there are many rural counties in West Virginia with small school districts, and salaries are lower than the average salaries found throughout the region. Teacher salaries in West Virginia average $44,701 as compared to surrounding states such as Ohio ($54,656), Kentucky ($47,875), Pennsylvania ($57,237) and Maryland ($62,849) (National Education Association, 2012).

Coupled with these demographics, the educational stakeholders in West Virginia are concerned with the quality of WL teaching in the state. Schulz (2000) highlights the need to research and to define teacher behaviors and skills for initial certification and professional licensing. In addition to economic and geographical hurdles, West Virginia is examining issues relating to the language proficiency of its WL teachers. Currently, only 21 states use official ACTFL proficiency testing (Oral Proficiency Interview or OPI and the Writing Proficiency Test) as part of their certification process (Chambless, 2012), which serves as a means to ensure that their WL teachers have proficiency in the target language. West Virginia had not implemented a language proficiency requirement for pre-service or in-service WL teachers at the time of this research. Such proficiency requirements are important because language teachers with limited proficiency may abandon more communicative teaching methods and instead rely on grammar or textbook-based instruction (Wilbur, 2007). Furthermore, none of the state’s teacher education programs had achieved National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) program recognition at the time of this research. The rigor of teacher education programs developed around the NCATE standards, in particular the requirement of Advanced-Low language proficiency (Chambless, 2012; Huhn, 2012), may support the implementation of a proficiency requirement for state WL teacher certification.

Although the aforementioned challenges affect the state’s rate of progress in expanding and improving WL education, significant advancement has been made in recent years. WVFLTA is actively promoting and improving WL education through conferences, advocacy, and support of novice and veteran language teachers in the state. Through collaboration with the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and the Cemanahuac Institute in Cuernavaca, Mexico, the association has offered scholarships to both pre-service and practicing teachers in order to pursue opportunities to build their language proficiency through study abroad programs. Additionally, two state-level coordinators support WL programs through initiatives such as Global21, and Foreign Language Assistance Program grants (West Virginia Department of Education, 2012). In the fall of 2011 with the appointment of a new state superintendent, these efforts continued to grow. Through public speeches and newspaper articles, the superintendent has become an advocate for WLs at the state level (Marple, 2012).

Despite the advocacy from various educational stakeholders, there is a dearth of information related to the current practices of WL teachers in the state. Such data would provide direction for professional development, and support teacher education programs in the state as they work towards meeting the rigor of NCATE program recognition. Given the shortage of information about WL teachers’ practice in
the state, the researcher conducted survey-based research in order to gain preliminary insight into the current classroom activities of WL teachers.

In spring of 2010, an initial survey was administered to provide preliminary information about the WL classroom in West Virginia. Findings from this research resulted in several notable conclusions about the use of the target language in the WL classrooms of West Virginia (Huhn, 2011). First, ACTFL recommends that in order to provide significant levels of communication, WL teachers should use the target language in the classroom 90% or more (ACTFL, 2010). Findings from the initial research showed that WL teachers in West Virginia report feeling confident in their language abilities (65%), but indicate notably lower levels of target language use. Only 35% of respondents indicated that they use the target language 75% or more of their instructional time (Huhn, 2011). The low percentage of WL teachers indicating that they use the target language may be of interest to the state’s teacher education programs, in future professional development and ongoing discussions of WL education in the state.

Wilbur’s (2007) research found that teachers with more limited linguistic abilities may abandon more communicative teaching methods and instead rely on grammar- or textbook-based instruction. A second finding from the original research indicates that the most frequently used strategies included book work (88%) and worksheets (88%). Additionally, 70% of respondents identified a textbook as one of their main sources and 30% listed the textbook as their only or primary source of instructional materials. An executive summary of the initial survey is available online (Huhn, 2010). The findings provided a foundation on which to base future research. Thus, a second survey was developed and administered in spring of 2011.

While both surveys were limited in scope, with small sample sizes, the data gathered will be used to provide a foundation on which to inform stakeholders in teacher education programs, build continued discussions, expand professional development, and effect continued change in WL education in West Virginia.

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature revealed the complexity of effective WL teaching, and it is important to clarify the meaning of effective teaching, its components and the challenges in operationalizing that definition. Second, the contributions of classroom activities, the national standards, textbook use and assessment to that definition are discussed.

What is Effective Teaching?

Significant research exists that defines the good language learner, but current research does not provide a clear consensus on how to define good teaching (Chambless, 2012). Research on teacher self-efficacy and teacher training have come to the forefront (Cooper, 2004; Stronge, et al., 2011; Swanson, 2008, 2012), but scholarship regarding what effective WL language teachers do in the classroom to support student learning is scarce.

It remains difficult to operationalize the definition of effective teaching. Effectiveness is an elusive concept to define given the complex tasks of teaching and potential variety of teaching contexts, and there is considerable debate on how teach-
er effectiveness should be judged (Stronge, et al., 2011). States are now working to define and measure teacher effectiveness. Furthermore, researchers in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have not yet developed a universal definition of what constitutes effective language instruction (Bell, 2005; Ellis, 2008, Schulz, 2000), and little research has revealed discipline-specific criteria of what comprises effective language instruction (Bell 2005; Schulz, 2000). While the ACTFL/NCATE standards are rigorous and provide opportunities for strong teacher development, the literature base lacks documentation about what WL teachers actually do in the classroom to bring students to higher levels of learning. Additionally, there are not any performance-based assessments beyond the initial certification requirement that would support those criteria (Schulz, 2000; Huhn, 2012).

Among the sparse research on WL classroom practices, Bell (2005) and Ellis (2008) suggest some criteria for defining effective teaching that can be used when evaluating the practices of experienced teachers in West Virginia. Bell (2005) defined effective foreign language teaching as “clear and enthusiastic teaching that provides learners with the grammatical (syntactical and morphological), lexical, phonological, pragmatic, and socio-cultural knowledge and interactive practice they need to communicate successfully in the target language” (p. 260). She adds that there should be less focus on error correction or focus on grammatical form.

On the other hand, Ellis (2008) cautions against formulating a definition of effective language instruction that is too prescriptive, especially with a lack of consensus from the field. Nevertheless, he offers several principles that contribute to a definition of a good language teacher. Specifically, students need a variety of experiences, opportunities to focus on both form and function, opportunities for both input and output, and activities that promote interaction with both teachers and other students in both controlled and free production. Ellis also identifies the importance of maximizing natural acts of communication to the extent possible in the classroom and recommends a zero grammar approach, which he defines as not attempting to predetermine linguistic content of a lesson.

Noting this sparse research base, it can be argued that an effective language teacher should provide their students with a balance between a focus on form and a focus on meaning, engage in a variety of classroom activities that present students with a variety of experiences, and provide an environment that allows for as much natural communication possible. Additionally, effective WL teaching should include the concepts of backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (National Standards, 2006) and performance assessments, which provide feedback and improve instruction (Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

Classroom Activities

In order to engage learners and provide opportunities to develop essential communicative competencies in a WL, teachers must create an appropriate classroom environment that incorporates the foundations defined above. A review of the literature provides a plethora of possible resources, ideas and activities that could be used to support such a classroom. One specific method that has been shown to be effective in the language classroom is Project Based Instruction (PBI) (Mikulec &
Miller, 2011), also known as Project Based Learning. Designed to engage students in collaboration, PBI allows learners to incorporate attention to both form and to function, provide opportunities for free language response and to develop and demonstrate their abilities in the language. Group activities, technology-based activities, standards based instruction, and performance based assessment are also potential components of PBI instruction.

Standards

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (National Standards, 2006) describe the goals of foreign language learning. The standards were not intended as a curriculum guide, but rather suggest the types of curricular experiences needed to enable students to achieve the standards, and support the ideal of extended sequences of study that begin in the elementary grades and continue through high school and beyond, they do not describe specific course content, nor recommended sequence of study (p. 28).

However, familiarity with the standards does not necessarily lead to classroom implementation. Glisan (1996) underscores the role of teachers' beliefs by noting that the only way for standards to alter instruction is to alter the way teachers think about their teaching. Allen (2002) conducted survey research on teachers in three Midwestern states, connecting the beliefs of classroom teachers with the standards. She found that while teachers' pedagogical beliefs may be aligned with the standards, the teachers indicated only moderate familiarity with the standards themselves. Her findings support previous research that found that familiarity with the standards alone is insufficient in motivating change in instructional practices.

Most recently, the ACTFL Standards Impact Survey: A Decade of Foreign Language Standards: Influence, Impact, and Future Directions, examined the impact of the national student standards on foreign language education (ACTFL, 2011). Among the many findings, 89% of the respondents indicated that they were familiar with the standards, 80% reported following a curriculum related to the national standards, and 78% of respondents indicated that their state standards mirror the national standards. The researchers went on to evaluate the impact of the respondents' knowledge on their lessons. Seventy-two percent believed that their knowledge of the national standards has influenced the way they plan their lessons.

Textbook Use

Historically, WLs have frequently been taught by what has been labeled the coverage model (Chaffee, 1992), where the curriculum is determined by the textbook, and teaching and learning are viewed as a passive transfer of information (Allen, 2002). Bragger and Rice (2000) found that textbooks were still central to the WL classroom, and research on textbook use in the last decade has not substantiated a change in this trend. However, a standards-based curriculum is not necessarily tied to the use of a textbook, and effective teachers' use a variety of sources and instructional methods to support student learning (Allen, 2002).

The WL profession is dynamic, driven by a myriad of factors of teaching and learning a new language. Consequently, the call for change in textbooks is constantly in flux, as standards are developed and revised, and the current teaching paradigm
evolves. However, textbooks have not always kept up with current research. Textbooks tend to drive curriculum, but all too often teachers do not take an active role in textbook selection, or do so only superficially (Bragger & Rice, 2000), and there is a disparity between SLA theory and practice (Aski, 2003).

Research indicates that textbooks still tend to follow traditional approaches (Fernández, 2011; Rubio, Passey, & Campbell, 2004) although some evidence suggests that SLA research has begun to influence textbook development at the post-secondary level. Fernández (2011) found that the majority of textbooks remain focused on grammar-based instruction where rules are presented and then practiced. Traditional language production tasks that progress from very prescriptive activities, often lacking in context, to less-restrictive drills or other manipulation of a specific form are not fully supported by SLA research. Additionally, she finds that many textbooks still overlook the central role of input in language instruction.

Wong and VanPatten (2003) engaged in a detailed discussion of the drills such as those commonly found in textbooks. They concluded that not only do mechanical drills not support language acquisition, but that they may actually impede student progress in developing language proficiency. One consequence of an extensive reliance on the use of a textbook, or on the coverage model, is that it may limit essential opportunities for students to produce both controlled and free language production that Ellis (2008) advocates. What these authors have found at the post-secondary level is equally true of many K-12 textbooks. Textbooks may help with formulaic, structured focus on form, but textbook exchanges are often scripted and specific to a topic. Real world, authentic communication is unpredictable, and avoiding an over-reliance on the textbook will support the zero grammar (not attempting to control linguistic outcomes) concept that Ellis promotes.

Assessment

Achievement in a standards-based curriculum is measured by authentic assessments that model real-world language use (Allen, 2002). Measuring student progress primarily by discrete point, grammar-based examinations or quizzes alone relegates the language to focus on form (Sandrock, 2010). Shrum and Glisan (2010) advocate that assessments should be contextualized and based on what learners should be able to do by the end of a period of instruction. Additionally, assessments should engage students in meaningful communication, address at least one mode of communication, be performance-based, encourage divergent responses and creativity, and can be either formative or summative. Moreover, a backwards design model should be used so that assessments are planned “as part of a thematic unit, before instruction begins” (p. 396). That is, WL teachers need to focus first on the objectives and assessments then move toward instruction (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

One specific type of assessment that may help strengthen the connection between standards-based instruction and assessment is the Integrated Performance Assessment, which incorporates the three modes of communication delineated in the national standards (Adair-Hauck, Glisan, Koda, Swender, & Sandrock, 2006). The three tasks in an integrated performance assessment are aligned thematically, and reflect real world language use. The tasks are interrelated and the completion of each task provides the foundation for completion of the next task. Other assess-
ments used in a standards-driven classroom are authentic assessments, which are assessments connected to real language production, and the use of rubrics as an assessment tool (Sandrock, 2010; Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

Recently, the ACTFL Standards Impact Survey (ACTFL, 2011) provided evidence that a lag remains between the development of standards-driven curriculum and performance-based assessments. Respondents indicated that their assessment measures were either in the beginning stages or in progress, and curricular implementations of standards were evident through classroom observations (84%), follow-up discussions with teachers (83%), professional development activities (75%), and lesson plans (73%). Assessment practices (78%) provided additional evidence, although alignment of district assessments was more limited (43%) (ACTFL, 2011).

In summation, effective teaching can be characterized by the creation of a classroom environment that supports a variety of classroom activities, not necessarily driven by the curriculum in a textbook. An effective teacher also uses the standards as a goal to work towards, and incorporates authentic, performance-based assessments beyond discrete point grammar exams or quizzes.

Keeping this working definition in mind, the present study was guided by six research questions that formed the basis for survey based research to investigate classroom practices by WL teachers in West Virginia.

1. What kinds of activities are teachers familiar with and do they use in the classroom?
2. What role does the textbook play in the WL classroom?
3. How do teachers perceive the Standards?
4. How do teachers determine their students’ learning goals?
5. How do teachers determine what kinds of activities to use in their classrooms to achieve those learning goals?
6. How do teachers assess their students’ performance?

Methods

In spring of 2010, an initial survey was administered online to WL teachers in West Virginia (N = 302). Seventy-three responses were received for an overall response rate of 24%. A follow up survey was sent to WL teachers in the spring of 2011. Both surveys administered in this research were made available to prospective study participants using an e-mail listserv of WL educators in the state. The state WL coordinators and university departments of modern languages also encouraged participation in the survey. Participants were given the option to register to be entered into a drawing for an Amazon.com gift card as an incentive to complete the survey.

In spring of 2011, a second, more open-ended survey was administered, which expanded on areas of interest in the initial survey. The second survey was coded to allow trends and issues to surface that would delve further into how WL teachers chose their classroom goals and activities. The second survey was also presented electronically to the same population, to 310 individuals. Fifty-two WL educators responded, for a response rate of 17%. Although these response rates for both surveys could be considered low, the findings represent the perceptions of these individuals and provide valuable information to stakeholders and direction for future research. Copies of both surveys are available.
Demographics

Demographics for respondents to both surveys were nearly identical in terms of teacher's backgrounds, credentials, education levels, current positions, and language(s) taught (See Appendix A). For the preliminary survey, 77% of respondents were grades 7-12 teachers, 25% were university faculty, and fewer than 1% were teachers or facilitators for the West Virginia Virtual School. Many teachers in West Virginia hold multi-level appointments, and respondents were allowed to select more than one level. The second survey provided a deeper analysis of the demographic data showing that 50% taught high school, 31% taught middle school and 4% taught elementary level. Twenty-one percent were university faculty, and 6% were teachers or facilitators for the virtual school.

Findings

Classroom Activities

The purpose of the first research question was to discover what kinds of activities the participants were familiar with and what types of activities they used in their classrooms. Responses to the initial list of potential classroom activities (Table 1) shows that WL educators at all levels in West Virginia were well-versed in a variety of teaching methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Ended Question/Answer</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Group work</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookwork</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read aloud</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Presentations</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer-based activities</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skits/play acting</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral True False Questions</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group presentations</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell-ringers/warm-ups</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Based Learning</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPRS/Storytelling</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, when asked about teaching methods and activities they actually used, responses varied greatly. Among the strategies they had never used or did not like, respondents identified some methods that would provide key opportunities for input, and natural communication, including TPRS/Storytelling, cloze activities, skits and play acting, and simulations.

When asked for more details as to how frequently they utilized these various methods and activities listed, some interesting trends were noted. The most frequently used methods and activities were student group work (51%), open-ended question/answer activities (47%), bookwork (43%), and worksheets (33%). The method
used least frequently was TPRS (60%), despite indications that teachers were familiar with it. This well-established method uses storytelling and play-acting to provide students opportunities for language production. However, TPRS does require some training and experience in order to effectively apply it in the classroom, especially for teachers with limited language proficiency.

Textbook Use

When asked to identify what instructional materials they use on a consistent basis in the classroom (in the original survey), 70% of respondents identified a textbook as one of their sources. Additionally, 30% identified the textbook as their only or primary response. Given the limitations of textbooks, and the need to provide classroom opportunities for language production, the initial responses to the question of what strategies are being used in the classroom piqued the curiosity of the researcher. The percentages of teachers citing the use of textbook based teaching materials led the researcher to further investigate the role the textbook plays in the 21st Century classroom in West Virginia. A textbook or written worksheet can provide support for language learners, but over-reliance any one input method can be detrimental to a communicative classroom. To better understand the responses to the first survey, the second survey relied on more qualitative methods in order to reveal what methods were actually being used.

As noted above, in a standards-driven, 21st century classroom, one would not expect to see students spending large amounts of time engaging in textbook-based activities. Ninety percent of respondents indicated that they used a textbook in their classrooms. They reported using the textbook three to five times per week (33%) or daily (31%). Responses indicated that a textbook was used once or twice a week (21%), intermittently (6%) or less than once per week (4%) were less frequent. The few who did not use a textbook offered only that the program was part of an online program, or that the students were too young for it (elementary level). One participant also commented, “I find myself more motivated to make my own plans and create more engaging projects when I do not use a textbook- it sometimes becomes a crutch and cannot be extended the way I would like.”

Only 38% of respondents identified the textbook as a reference source, tool or supplement (particularly noting the CD or DVD ancillary materials). Respondents indicated that they use the textbook as a resource for vocabulary (34%), grammar review or practice (32%), general practice (28%), reading activities (15%), culture or cultural readings (10%), and listening activities (8%). As previously mentioned, research indicates that an overuse of drills can be detrimental to language learning (Wong & VanPatten, 2003), as is overabundant focus on form, which can limit the amount of time that can be used for communicate practice and other creative uses of the language. Nonetheless, 12% of respondents identified a restrictive use of the textbook such as using it to organize the classroom, for drills, or structuring their teaching primarily around the textbook.

Teacher Perceptions of the State CSOs and Standards-driven Curriculum

To expand the description of what is occurring in the 21st century world language classroom in West Virginia, it is useful to understand how teachers perceive the Standards and how they use the CSOs into their learning goals. To that end,
participants were asked to rate the West Virginia CSOs on a scale of 1 (Not at All Relevant to what I want to teach or the language proficiency of my students) to 5 (Very Relevant to what I want to teach and the language proficiency of my students). Only 17% of respondents indicated the CSOs were very relevant; most respondents gave ratings between 3 and 4 (23% and 40%, respectively). Only 10% of respondents indicated that they do not use the CSOs, which suggests that the majority of respondents found the West Virginia CSOs to be at least somewhat relevant to their teaching. Only 4% of respondents indicated no familiarity with the West Virginia CSOs.

When asked to describe how they use the CSOs, 43% of respondents stated that they review the CSOs first, and then design lessons from them. For example, one respondent described how he/she designed instruction by using “the national and state standards and their intersection with the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. I keep them in mind when determining competencies I shoot for and backward design my instruction.” A smaller percentage (33%) of the respondents planned their lessons, and then looked for CSOs that fit the lessons. These results hint at the incorporation of the Standards into instruction beyond believing they have value.

Additionally, teachers were asked to respond to an open-ended question regarding how they determine their learning goals for the classroom. Of those responding, 65% indicated that the Standards determined their learning goals, either primarily or in combination with the textbook or other factors. By contrast, 14% of respondents indicated student needs as the determinant of their learning goals. While only 6% of respondents directly included the concept of backwards design, the respondents’ use of the Standards to determine their learning goals suggests an awareness of the concept of designing instruction with the end goals in mind. One participant explained the process, demonstrating the complexities that influence effective teaching.

Depending on the level I examine the CSOs and establish my goals around them and materials I have used in the past to reach these goals. I re-examine these throughout the course and add additional activities to help reach and reinforce these goals. I also try to tie in my experiences in other countries and develop activities that weave these cultural and environmental experiences together with coursework.

Ten percent of respondents indicated that someone else determined their learning goals for them. This response may be a result of either a coordinated language curriculum or that some of the respondents were classroom mediators in the state’s virtual school, which uses classroom mentors, the phone, and the internet to reach students in rural counties where there are no classroom WL teachers. Nevertheless, it does lead to the question of ownership of the material one teaches. As one respondent noted “Our goals are determined by our phone teachers for the Virtual Spanish.” Post-secondary respondents also touched on this issue. One post-secondary respondent commented that

The learning goals are determined more by the university based syllabus. We have a certain amount of material to cover per semester. Based on that goal, we are able to instill various teaching methods to assure that the students have acquired the necessary skills to be successful in the course and proceed to the next level.
When asked how they chose activities to achieve their learning goals, 44% of respondents indicated that student engagement or motivation was the primary factor that determined the planned activities. The responses to this survey hint at the fact that issues of learner perception, beliefs and motivation played an ongoing role in the current WL classroom in the state. As one respondent commented, “I am always looking for activities that motivate the students to use the language in a fun way. I try to provide a variety of activities that give the students firsthand, real-life experiences in the language.”

Assessment

The final research question addressed how educators assess their students’ performance. As previously noted, assessment in a standards based curriculum mirrors real-world language use (Allen, 2002) which may not occur by using traditional examinations and quizzes alone. On this topic, when asked how they assessed their students’ performance, 63% of respondents indicated they used assessments such as exams and quizzes either alone or in conjunction with other types of assessments. In addition, 17% of respondents reported using some form of specific skill-based assessment: 46% cited oral assessment, 23% writing assessments, 17% listening comprehension and 6% reading comprehension. Twenty-nine percent of respondents reported project-based assessments, possibly as a result of the previously mentioned summer professional development institute on project-based learning. Interestingly, only one participant mentioned the three modes of communication in their comments on how they assess their students. References to performance-based assessments, including integrated performance assessments (14%), Formative or summative assessments 11% and authentic assessments (4%) were also limited. Only passing mentions of goal based or standards driven assessments or the use of rubrics were noted.

While some of the assessments may mirror real-world language use, it was apparent that the teachers reached by this project have not yet fully incorporated standards-based assessment into their classrooms. When asked what does drive their choice in assessment, answers varied widely, from ease of use and time to create the assessment to creation by a third party (someone else, or a textbook assessment). Student factors such as age, ability, and comfort level also surfaced (13%). The largest set of responses (19%) indicated that the decision was driven by what was taught. This wide variation suggests that teachers in West Virginia are still developing their standards based assessment measures.

Discussion

These surveys were conducted in order to reveal more detail about what occurs in the WL classrooms in West Virginia. The results suggest that while teachers engaged in a number of effective practices, there remains room for improvement and further professional development.

To revisit the components of the working definition of effective teaching delineated earlier, an effective teacher creates a classroom environment that provides a balance between a focus on form and a focus on meaning, engages in a variety of classroom activities, and provides an environment that allows for the maximum
natural communication possible. Effective language teaching is also achievement driven, focusing on what students are able to accomplish in the classroom, incorporating the standards, the concept of backwards design, and appropriate assessments beyond discrete point grammar assessments.

In terms of what kind of activities teachers use in their classrooms, and how they use the textbook, results of the present study suggest that respondents used a variety of activities in their classrooms. Many of the possible activities have the potential to provide opportunities for natural communication. This variety of activities may also provide students with opportunities to focus on both form and function, opportunities for both input and output, and activities that promote interaction with both teachers and other students in both free and controlled production.

Nonetheless, there remain opportunities to incorporate expanded activities such as TPRS, and to reconsider some of the uses of the textbook, treating it as a tool or resource, rather than the primary source of curriculum. Ninety percent of respondents indicated they do use the textbook which may help provide that necessary focus on form, and some respondents already use the textbook as a resource rather than the primary source for their pedagogical choices.

Also of note, in light of Wilbur’s (2007) research involving teachers with lower levels of language proficiency, and the lack of data available on the proficiency levels of the state’s WL teachers, it is difficult to determine if the respondent’s language proficiency limitations are affecting their classroom strategies. Additional professional development may be beneficial in helping teachers develop the skills to incorporate additional target language use in the classroom. The state’s teacher education programs should also urge their pre-service teachers to develop high levels of language proficiency, in order to assure continued change and growth. Continued participation in immersion activities, such as language immersion weekends, and travel abroad should be encouraged.

The respondents to the survey indicate that they believe that the state CSOs have pedagogical value and have begun to incorporate them into their curriculum. The data indicating that 80% of respondents found the CSOs at least somewhat relevant to their instruction, and that 43% indicate that they use them in designing their curriculum suggest that those teachers responding to the survey have begun to incorporate the state standards into their instruction. This lends support to Allen’s (2002) assertion that it is the teacher’s belief in the value of the standards is more crucial than detailed knowledge of the standards. However, in a communicative language classroom, assessment should be performance driven, and responses to this survey indicate that this may still be emerging in the classroom. Again here, teacher education programs and professional development opportunities can be used to support this implementation.

When compared to the recent data from the ACTFL Standards Impact Survey (ACTFL, 2011), it appears that West Virginia’s progress towards a standards based curriculum is similar to the impact of the national standards. While the state standards (CSOs) have influenced the WL curriculum in West Virginia, a lag in the development of strong standards-based assessment remains. In the case of West Virginia, the survey data suggest that it is the specifics of standards-based assessment that may not have reached wide implementation. The summer institute on PBI that
occurred three years prior to the survey may have contributed to the incorporation of project-based assessment (29% of respondents), which aligns more appropriately with standards-based instruction. It is also possible that this is the result of the fact that the previous summer professional development opportunity included follow up activities that the participants completed in their own classrooms. Continuing professional opportunities of this type should be encouraged by all stakeholders.

Limitations and Potential for Future Research

Limitations are universal to research, and the current study is no exception. To begin, these are small-scale surveys, and it may be difficult to generalize them beyond the immediate population. While the data will likely prove invaluable to the stakeholders in the state, including the WL coordinators, state language teachers association, and teacher education programs, caution must be used in generalizing these results to all populations. However, there are likely other states facing similar challenges, and this research may prove valuable in supporting those efforts. A particular ongoing challenge in the state has been difficulty in reaching all WL educators in the state. The states WL teachers association makes ongoing efforts to maintain and increase contact with WL teachers in the state, and future research will need to continue those efforts.

There remains ample room for additional research in this area. In particular, it may be beneficial to do classroom observations, focus groups, and other qualitative measures to clarify and expand on these results. It is also important to note that survey data is self-reported, and case studies and classroom observations may help triangulate data from teacher’s responses. As part of the incentive for the survey, participants were given a separate opportunity to enter their names into an online form for a gift card drawing. This same form also provided an opportunity to volunteer to be part of follow-up measures such as focus groups, interviews, or other discussions or research regarding WLs in West Virginia. Nineteen participants responded positively, providing a potential working contingent on which to base classroom observations or other qualitative research as the next logical step in this project. Future research should include classroom observations of these same respondents, as well as comparative surveys of other states or specific sub-groups (such as language specific groups) of the population.

It is important to reiterate the purpose of this research. Despite the limited response rate and small sample sizes, these results provide insight into the WL classrooms in West Virginia. Findings from the current study will support WL education and governing bodies in determining the needs of both teachers and learners. Currently in West Virginia, a task force is examining the policies, initiatives, programs and areas of concentration to evaluate the effectiveness in achieving intended outcomes related to K-12 WL education. The results of these surveys will provide valuable information for that task force. The responses also provide useful and pertinent information for teacher education programs and practicing teachers, help guide the development of future state-wide professional development and support initiatives by the state’s WL association.

Stronge et al. (2011) emphasize the fundamental need to improve the teaching that occurs in our classrooms. They add that in order to effect change in the quality
of our education, we must continue to probe the question of what constitutes effective teaching. Although this study has a number of limitations, and is constrained in generalizability, it is hoped that the data and insight gathered from this research will serve that purpose.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express sincere appreciation to the editors of SCOLT Dimension and to the previous reviewers for their extensive feedback on earlier drafts of this manuscript.

Endnotes

1 Further information is available from, http://www2.ed.gov/programs/flap/index.html
2 https://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=en&formkey=dF9lcUhZbTVuUFpMdUktS053Y1h1VWc6MA#gid=0
3 https://spreadsheets.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dGdLdGdLdGdLdGdLdG5ha2hvOTZLUlNmRE1fYWM5WkE6MA#gid=0
4 Detailed information is available from, http://wvde.state.wv.us/global21/

References


**Appendix A: Full demographic information**

**Table 3:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Credentials</th>
<th>Original Survey</th>
<th>Follow-up Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fully licensed and certified in the area I teach</td>
<td>48 64%</td>
<td>36 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree in the area I teach</td>
<td>17 23%</td>
<td>9 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified, but teaching on an endorsement</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>5 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term sub position</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-tenure track faculty position</td>
<td>3 4%</td>
<td>4 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time adjunct or instructor in higher education</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenured position in higher education, not yet tenured</td>
<td>5 7%</td>
<td>4 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenured position in higher education</td>
<td>7 9%</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>4 7%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 4:  
*Current Position*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Original Survey</th>
<th>Follow-up Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher K-12</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Virtual School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Faculty</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Respondents were able to select multiple levels*

Table 5:  
*Educational level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Original Survey</th>
<th>Follow-up Survey</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate Certification</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Board Certification</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6:  
*Language Taught*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Original Survey</th>
<th>Follow-up Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Snapshot of their Beliefs and Practices: Perspectives of Mississippi and Alabama Spanish Teachers

Kelly Moser  
*Mississippi State University*

Jennifer Weir  
*University of Southern Mississippi*

Krista Chambless  
*University of Alabama at Birmingham*

**Abstract**

As a result of the ACTFL/NCATE Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers (2002) much progress has been made with regard to identifying what teachers should know and be able to do. A survey of secondary Spanish teachers in the 20 largest school districts in Alabama and Mississippi investigated teacher beliefs about their teacher preparation, proficiency, and practices within and beyond the classroom context. Results of the survey indicate a disparity between teacher beliefs and classroom practice. The results as well as implications for teacher education programs and professional development are discussed.

The paradigm shift that has occurred in foreign language teaching over the last 30 years reflects the increasing demand for students to participate in a global society. The move to communicative language teaching, as opposed to grammar-based language teaching, has brought with it many challenges. One of these challenges is how to prepare teachers to use communicative methodologies. Thus, in the past decade, the foreign language profession has worked to develop standards for foreign language teachers. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in conjunction with the National Council of the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) developed the ACTFL/NCATE Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers (2002). These standards provide a framework for what beginning language teachers should know and be able to do at the end of their teacher preparation program. The standards are used to determine whether teacher education programs merit recognition at the national level.
A concern regarding the standards is that they were developed through consensus of experts in the field rather than on empirical research. Recognizing the need for more empirical data to support what experts believe to be good language teaching, ACTFL launched a research priorities initiative to identify the key areas in which research is currently needed in foreign language instruction and learning to inform and improve classroom practice; attract researchers to conduct research in these key areas; and sponsor this research through funding, publication, and dissemination of research results to the field and other stakeholders. (ACTFL, 2011, n.p.)

One area identified by this initiative is the need for model foreign language teacher preparation programs. Huhn (2012) provided a comprehensive overview on this topic calling for “longitudinal studies that empirically illustrate the performance of teachers who have completed an NCATE Nationally Recognized teacher education program” (p. S177). However, before these types of studies can be undertaken, it is important to examine the current programs in each state as well as the current beliefs and practices of foreign language teachers.

The purpose of this study is to examine teacher beliefs about their teacher preparation, proficiency, and practices within and beyond the classroom context in Alabama and Mississippi. First, a review of current literature will be presented followed by the research study data. A discussion of the results and implications for the future of foreign language education follow.

**Literature Review**

**Pedagogical Knowledge**

The Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers (ACTFL, 2002) are rooted in the profession’s student standards. These same standards consist of six content standards which underscore the knowledge of language, literature, culture, and linguistics. Given this framework, the preparation of foreign language teacher candidates is no longer viewed as the sole responsibility of faculty in education. McAlpine and Dhonau (2007) and Pearson, Fonseca-Greber, and Foell (2006) emphasized the role of colleagues in departments of foreign languages in assisting teacher candidates in meeting Standards 1, 2, and 6.

It is clear that foreign language teacher education programs are making progress toward reaching the goals of the Program Standards (Shrum & Fox, 2010). Although it may be challenging, since 2005 when the first reports were submitted using the Program Standards, an increasing number of programs have been labeled as successful (Shrum & Fox, 2010). This trend continues to grow given that in 2010, 67% of the reporting programs were identified as receiving national recognition or recognition with conditions (NCATE, 2011). This is an increase from 47% in 2008, 25% in 2006, and 13% in 2005 (Shrum & Fox, 2010).

Although the number of foreign language teacher education programs that are using the Program Standards is increasing, there are far too many that fail to do so. Thus, while some states are meeting these challenging standards, others have made little progress in this area. This issue is further exacerbated given the quan-
dary of teacher shortage, which has directly influenced how interested individuals seek certification. Although the recent position statement of ACTFL (2012) encourages all programs, including alternate certification and added-on/endorsement, to use the Program Standards, there is no mandate that requires them to do so. This troubling fact causes us to ponder a question posed by Glisan (2001), “To whom will our teacher preparation standards apply? All, only traditional four- or five-year programs? Effective teachers. . . or warm bodies” (p. 166).

Content Knowledge

The first two Program Standards address the need for teachers to have strong content knowledge. Content knowledge for foreign language teachers is very complex because the teacher must not only possess a strong knowledge about the target language (grammar, pronunciation, etc) and culture (literature, art, music, daily life, etc) but must also have a high level of oral proficiency in that language. The Program Standards require teacher candidates to demonstrate oral proficiency at the Advanced-Low level. The focus on oral proficiency is not surprising given its pivotal role in delivering communicative, standards-based instruction. Historically, among all components of subject-matter knowledge, proficiency in the target language has been emphasized (Lafayette, 1993; Pearson et al., 2006; Schulz, 2000).

The profession has continued to emphasize the importance of oral proficiency by recommending that the target language be used 90% of the time in the classroom (ACTFL, 2010). Likewise, the research priorities initiative highlighted the need for research in the area of teacher target language proficiency and its effect on student learning. Chambless (2012) highlighted the importance of a high level of oral proficiency in being an effective foreign language teacher. However, research in this area introduces some cause for concern. For example, Swender (2003) analyzed data from the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and revealed that approximately half of the interviewees failed to cross the Intermediate High/Advanced Low border. This difficulty in reaching higher levels of oral proficiency is not surprising given research by Cooper (2004) and Fraga-Cañadas (2010) who found that oral and listening proficiency were given scant attention in teacher candidates’ foreign language courses. Additionally, research (Hammadou-Sullivan, 2011) highlights the importance of exposure to the target language in a variety of contexts outside of the classroom in developing higher levels of oral proficiency.

In addition to the challenging nature of reaching high levels of proficiency, another issue has emerged from research. Although the Program Standards set Advanced Low as the requisite for NCATE-recognition, few states require a level of oral proficiency for certification. Conversely, data suggest that states are beginning to understand its role in effective foreign language teaching. For example, in 2011, 21 states required the OPI for certification compared to a mere seven states in 2004. However, only 16 of those states require the Advanced Low level while the other states set the requirement at Intermediate High (Chambless, 2012). Some states require demonstration of oral proficiency in certain languages but not in others. Although national standards exist, the application of them nationally is still quite varied. According to Chambless (2012), one reason for
the lack of uniformity in oral proficiency standards for FL teacher certification across states can be explained by dissonance between professional beliefs and practical reality: Some states may opt for the standard that can be achieved by most teacher candidates, whereas NCATE and other states have chosen a higher standard based on professional principles; still other states have decided not to take a stand. (2012, p. S145)

Much research is still needed to determine the best ways in which to help foreign language teachers improve their language skills. Chambless (2012) recognized the importance of needs analysis research to show how best to support foreign language teachers in maintaining and improving their target language proficiency in order to develop professional development guidelines recommended for in-service foreign language teachers.

In a previous study, Fraga-Cañadas (2010) developed and distributed a survey to measure the characteristics, beliefs, and practices of Spanish teachers in Ohio. The present study responds to her recommendation “to replicate the survey in other cities and states” (Fraga-Cañadas, 2010, p. 413). Although Ohio is among the 21 states that requires a minimum level of oral proficiency for certification in Spanish, Alabama and Mississippi are not. It is unknown whether these teachers will have similar convictions regarding foreign language teaching and learning as do their colleagues in Ohio. Investigating their beliefs, characteristics, and practices is vital considering the findings of Fraga-Cañadas (2010), which highlighted that the oral proficiency of teachers often declined following certification, and few teachers sought opportunities for professional development. Furthermore, according to NCATE (2012), Ohio has 17 nationally recognized foreign language education programs, which stands in contrast to Mississippi and Alabama, which respectively have one and zero nationally recognized programs. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do current Spanish teachers in Alabama and Mississippi, states without a language proficiency requirement, view their language skills/competence?
2. Do Alabama and Mississippi Spanish teachers engage in professional development or other practices to maintain and/or improve their proficiency?
3. What do Alabama and Mississippi Spanish teachers believe to be the most important characteristics of language teaching and learning?

**Methods**

The Spanish Teachers’ Survey (http://kellymoser.blogspot.com) was adapted from that designed and used by Fraga-Cañadas (2010), which consisted of 32 questions. The researchers who conducted the present study modified the original survey by adding questions regarding demographics (Question 1: Please check the district in which you teach Spanish.), certification (Question 3: How did you obtain your certification to teach Spanish?), proficiency (Question 9: Have you ever had your Spanish oral proficiency assessed?; Question 10: How was your Spanish oral proficiency assessed?; and Question 11: What did the results of your Spanish oral proficiency test indicate?), and professional development (Question 17: Are you aware of scholarships or grants for professional development as a Spanish teacher?; Question 18: Can you please share how you learned about these scholarships or grants?;
Question 19: Please describe the scholarships or grants for professional development which you have received.). These questions were added to elicit additional information regarding the participants and their teacher preparation programs. It should be noted that the survey used for Alabama teachers was identical to that distributed to Mississippi teachers with the exception of Questions 1 and 25, which included state-specific response choices.

The original study by Fraga-Cañadas (2010) included 106 Ohio Spanish teachers of one county. To reach a similar representative sample of Spanish teachers in Alabama and Mississippi, Spanish teachers in multiple districts were included. The survey was initially distributed online to the 10 largest districts in Alabama and an additional 10 in Mississippi. These districts were chosen based on the population data provided by the states’ departments of education. The email addresses for participants were located using the school websites, and participants were contacted directly via email. Among the 121 Spanish teachers invited to participate in Alabama and the 78 in Mississippi, only 29 completed the survey (n = 20 Alabama; n = 9 Mississippi), resulting in a response rate of 17% (Alabama) and 12% (Mississippi). In order to increase the response rate, the survey was sent a second time to an additional 10 districts from each state using the same population data from the states’ departments of education. Among the total 161 Alabama and 103 Mississippi Spanish teachers invited to participate in both cases, 87 responded (n = 59 Alabama; n = 28 Mississippi), bringing the Alabama response rate to 37% and the Mississippi response rate to 28%. Although the results of this survey will be presented in the next section of this paper, it is vital to note that due to the limited number of participants and the self-reported nature of the survey, the data are suggestive rather than conclusive. Generalizing the results to other Spanish teachers in these and other states should be done with caution. Although these data must be interpreted with caution, they provide a timely snapshot of teacher beliefs and practices as the profession focuses on improved teacher preparation.

Findings

Specifically regarding the demographic information gleaned from the survey, the data revealed that the majority of respondents in Alabama and Mississippi were nonnative Spanish teachers (NNSTs). Among the 86 total responses (28 Mississippi teachers and 58 Alabama teachers), 71% of respondents in Mississippi (n = 20) and 90% in Alabama (n = 52) were NNSTs. In only three cases was a language other than English or Spanish identified as the first language. For example, two respondents reported being native German speakers (one in Alabama and one in Mississippi), and one Alabama respondent identified French as his or her first language. An overwhelming majority of Spanish respondents in both states (78% or 21 teachers in Mississippi and 85% or 50 teachers in Alabama) were female. Using the same categories as Fraga-Cañadas (2010) with regard to teaching experience (e.g., novice = 1-5 years; experienced = 6-15 years; veteran = 16 or more years), there was some disparity between Alabama and Mississippi. While the percentage of Mississippi respondents was similarly divided into each of the three categories, Alabama respondents included more experienced and veteran teachers rather than novice Spanish educators.
Regarding education level, Alabama was characterized by more respondents with advanced degrees than Mississippi. Only 32% of Mississippi respondents had a master’s degree, compared to 75% in Alabama. Many respondents sought certification through an alternate route program or endorsement. In total, 68% \((n = 19)\) of the respondents in Mississippi and 54% \((n = 32)\) in Alabama sought alternate routes to certification. Regarding their academic majors, the majority of Alabama respondents (73%) reported Spanish or Education as their major; however, almost half of Mississippi respondents (48%) identified majors other than Spanish, education, or the dual concentration. Lastly, few Mississippi or Alabama respondents reported having taught Spanish beyond level two. Less than one-third of these teachers taught Spanish 3, 4, or AP. None of the Mississippi respondents reported experience with AP Spanish.

**Language Competence and Target Language Usage**

To answer the first research question regarding how participants in Alabama and Mississippi view their language skills, although few pursued certification via a traditional route, many respondents reported having had their oral proficiency assessed. Among the 61%, or 17 respondents in Mississippi referring to this experience, only two respondents referred to the OPI. Forty-four percent, or 26 respondents in Alabama, reported similarly; yet, only three cited the OPI. It is possible that Question 10 (How was your Spanish oral proficiency assessed?) and Question 11 (What did the results of your Spanish oral proficiency test indicate?) were not completely understood by survey respondents. Many qualitative responses did not appropriately address the question and included written answers such as yes, in a lab, and excellent. Still, approximately three-quarters of the respondents from Alabama (72%) and Mississippi (80%) assessed their own oral proficiency as either Advanced or Superior.

Concerning the evolution of their Spanish proficiency, approximately half of each state’s surveyed teachers reported that their overall proficiency had improved since beginning their teaching career. However, other survey data conflicted with this finding. For example, more than half of the respondents (73% Alabama and 56% Mississippi) reported only occasionally or never speaking Spanish with a Spanish-speaking colleague.

The qualitative comments provided by respondents in both states indicated a lack of confidence or low oral proficiency which influenced their decision to refrain from using the target language in conversations with other Spanish teachers. For example, written responses included, not my first language/lack of strong communication skills in target language, The other Spanish teacher at my school is a native speaker. Frankly, I have a hard time understanding her when she's speaking really fast, fear of making a mistake, and lack of confidence in speaking ability.

It appeared that willing teachers were also uncomfortable speaking Spanish with their colleagues whom they believed would have difficulty understanding the conversation. For example, teachers commented, worry that colleague won't understand, they are not proficient enough, and the other Spanish teacher does not feel comfortable speaking the language with me. I have tried, but it has not been successful.

Concerning target language usage in the classroom, although data indicated that in most cases their use of the target language increased as learners progressed through the 1-AP sequence, the highest average percentage of target language usage was 88% as indicated in Figure 1.
When asked to what degree teachers agreed or disagreed with statements regarding their proficiency, the majority of respondents in Mississippi (56%) and Alabama (73%) confirmed their lack of Spanish use while engaging with colleagues. This finding was surprising in view of the fact that the majority of both Mississippi (86%) and Alabama (86%) respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I frequently seek opportunities to speak in Spanish.”

Of Mississippi respondents, 95% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements “I believe my listening proficiency has improved since I started teaching,” “I frequently seek opportunities to read in Spanish,” and “I believe my reading proficiency has improved since I started teaching.” It is interesting to note that, while 95% of Mississippi respondents agreed that they frequently seek opportunities to read in Spanish, when asked to describe their frequency of reading in the target language in a later question of the survey, more than half reported only occasionally or never/rarely participating in that type of practice.

Alabama respondents responded strongly to the statement that “whenever I come across a native speaker of Spanish, I try to speak Spanish with him or her” with 92% of Alabama respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. Alabama respondents (90%) also agreed or strongly agreed that they frequently incorporate authentic materials to use in the classroom.

Professional Development and Practices to Improve Proficiency

In answering the second research question regarding their participation in professional development, the majority of respondents in both states have not participated in professional development directly related to Spanish or foreign language pedagogy. Only 32% of Mississippi respondents (n = 9) and 30% (n = 17) of Alabama respondents stated that they have attended a professional development opportunity
related to their content area, which reflects the findings of Fraga-Cañadas (2010). This finding, however, contradicts Pufahl and Rhodes (2011) who asserted that “73% of secondary schools with foreign language programs reported that their language teachers had participated in professional development or in-service training in their subject area…” (p. 268).

In Mississippi, responses ($n = 8$) included three references to the state language association conference. Additionally, two respondents mentioned the SCOLT conference, and one identified a TPR workshop. Furthermore, two respondents from Mississippi qualified departmental or district planning meetings with other foreign language teachers as professional development. Qualitative responses indicated that teachers were unsure of the pedagogical value of these opportunities. One participant responded that “[The professional development was at] most times not very helpful.” Alabama responses ($n = 17$) were more varied in terms of professional development activities and included TPR workshops, state and national conferences, study abroad, immersion programs, technology oriented professional development, and curricular/planning meetings. Three respondents specifically referenced a Spanish immersion program with the Super Teacher Program, a free week-long summer institute for 4th–12th grade teachers offered through the Alabama Humanities Foundation.

It is worth noting that the majority of the professional development activities reported by Alabama and Mississippi respondents were related to Spanish pedagogy rather than improving content knowledge including oral proficiency. The most frequent justification provided by respondents in both states for their lack of participation was their unawareness of available Spanish related professional development opportunities. As research (McAlpine, Cheatham, Dhonau, & Lytle, 2007; Patrick, 2009) suggests, time issues, costs, and distance were among the other reported reasons. Fewer than 50% of Mississippi respondents reported belonging to any sort of professional organization. Alabama respondents reported a slightly higher rate of participation in professional organizations with 59% of the teachers who indicated they were members of foreign language education professional organizations.

When asked to indicate the frequency with which they engaged in common practices to maintain their proficiency (Table 1), Alabama respondents cited listening to music (62%) and having entire conversations in Spanish (62%). Alabama respondents (67%), however, reported chatting online in Spanish to be their least frequent activity. Data from Mississippi respondents indicated a lack of preference with regard to their practices outside of the classroom since over half of the respondents ($n = 22$) either occasionally or never/rarely engaged in any of the listed activities. It is interesting to note that both in Alabama and Mississippi, at least half of the respondents indicated that they either frequently or almost always participated in entire conversations in Spanish, and yet more than half of those surveyed are not having these conversations with their colleagues.
Table 1

Practices Outside the Classroom (% of Respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>AL Never/Rarely</th>
<th>AL Occasionally</th>
<th>AL Frequently</th>
<th>AL Almost Always</th>
<th>MS Never/Rarely</th>
<th>MS Occasionally</th>
<th>MS Frequently</th>
<th>MS Almost Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read a book in SPN</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read magazines, news reports in SPN</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watched TV in SPN</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watched a movie in SPN</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to music in SPN</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had entire conversations in SPN</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surfed the Internet in SPN</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatted online in SPN</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote letters to friends or colleagues in SPN</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Important Characteristics for Spanish Teaching and Views of Teacher Preparation

Regarding the third research question, although the majority of respondents in both states considered all characteristics listed in the survey to be important, Mississippi respondents (95%) considered knowledge of Spanish grammar to be either important or very important. They also ranked the statement “Being able to comprehend oral and written media in Spanish” as equally valuable (95%). Alabama respondents (94%), on the other hand, considered the ability to interact successfully with native speakers to be the most important characteristic.

In order to put their aforementioned beliefs into their proper context, it is essential to examine the respondents’ perceptions of their teacher preparation program. Although Mississippi (61%) and Alabama (64%) respondents concurred regarding the role of grammar in their teacher program, they also indicated that they were well-prepared regarding reading (Alabama, 61%; Mississippi, 64%) and writing (Alabama, 54%; Mississippi, 64%). Approximately half of Alabama (58%) and Mississippi (54%) respondents reported being prepared only to some extent regarding speaking. Additionally, Mississippi (46%) and Alabama (57%) respondents felt equally ill-prepared in foreign language methodology.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine Mississippi and Alabama Spanish teachers’ beliefs about their teacher preparation, proficiency, and practices within and beyond the classroom context. Several key findings emerged which provide the opportunity to delve into the issues affecting foreign language teacher preparation in both Mississippi and Alabama. First, it should be noted that over half of the teachers responding to the survey sought certification through an alternate route program.
Since these programs are often not characterized by the same academic rigor as traditional programs seeking NCATE-accreditation, it can be assumed that these teachers may not have been held accountable for mastering content related to language, literature, linguistics, culture or content-specific pedagogy. According to the respondents’ analyses of their teacher preparation which seemed to emphasize reading and grammar, scarce attention was devoted to the development of listening or speaking proficiency, cultural knowledge, or foreign language methodology.

In order to accomplish the communicative goals emphasized in today’s model of language learning, teachers must demonstrate a minimal level of oral proficiency. Chambless (2012) underscored this essential component and stated “certainly, a teacher’s oral proficiency in the TL [target language] is not the sole determining factor in student achievement, but it has been generally accepted as an essential characteristic for effective teaching” (p. S142). Given this claim, the role of proficiency and the teachers’ self-assessment of their oral competence should not be overlooked. It is of concern that approximately half of the participants reported their oral proficiency as either static or declining. Yet, this finding is consistent with research by Fraga-Cañadas (2010). Furthermore, Swanson (2012) found that low self-efficacy is directly related to teacher attrition.

It is curious that most of the participants assessed their proficiency as either Advanced or Superior. Their comments regarding their lack of confidence using the target language contradict their self-assessed high levels of oral proficiency. Given research related to the difficulty in reaching these levels, as well as the few responses specifically citing the OPI, it is likely that these teachers were unfamiliar with the OPI and the description of each proficiency level. To this end, if teachers are unaware of these levels, it would be difficult for them to accurately assess their own linguistic ability. Likewise, it can be logically assumed that student performance is not assessed using the student proficiency guidelines, and realistic expectations for language learning are not discussed with language learners.

Given the conflicting data concerning teacher oral proficiency levels, a look at their classroom practices may be a key area for additional research. Data from this study revealed that these Spanish teachers failed to use the target language frequently during instruction. Although in most cases their use of the target language increased as the level of Spanish became more challenging, nearly all teachers still fell short of ACTFL’s recommended 90% target language use. Research indicates that low levels of oral proficiency as well as a lack of confidence in their oral skills are reasons that teachers rely on the first language in the classroom (Batemann, 2008; Cooper, 2004; Fraga-Cañadas, 2010; Franklin, 1990). Furthermore, the apparent lack of experience teaching more advanced language classes may also have adversely impacted the development of the teachers’ oral proficiency. According to Fraga-Cañadas (2011) this lack of experience “might give teachers a sense of security, [but] it would, at the same time, create a plateau effect for their target language abilities, especially their speaking proficiency” (p. 298). In addition to the lack of target language usage in the classroom, another indication of their oral proficiency levels is the fact that the participants not only chose to refrain from using the target language consistently while teaching, but these teachers also opted to avoid participating in authentic conversations with their Spanish-speaking colleagues. Their qualitative responses indicated
that they were aware of their own linguistic deficiencies which directly impacted their decision to abstain from these practices.

Since research (Donato, 2009; Fraga-Cañadas, 2011) highlights the role of professional development on the instructional practices of teachers in general, the data related to this phenomenon are especially troubling. On average, only one-third of the participants engaged in any professional development activity. In most cases, these opportunities to enhance one's knowledge about the field were focused on pedagogy rather than improving content knowledge. Such a finding is disquieting in light of the number of teachers in these states that reported that their proficiency had not improved since certification. It is plausible that opportunities for professional development which focus on honing communicative ability are few and far between (Fraga-Cañadas, 2010). However, since approximately half of the teachers in both states indicated that they were not members of any professional organization, it is also probable that this finding can be explained by lack of involvement in state, regional, and national associations for foreign language teachers. Additionally, this particular finding may be directly related to their reported lack of self-confidence while speaking in the target language as well. Swanson (2012) highlighted the relationship between membership in language associations and teachers’ perceptions of efficacy in content knowledge.

Although the data from this study highlight many obstacles in teaching according to today’s exciting new communicative paradigm, it should be mentioned that these teachers are not solely to blame for these shortcomings. In Alabama and Mississippi, there is only one nationally-recognized NCATE-accredited program of foreign language education. Furthermore, at least half of these teachers sought certification via an alternate route. Thus, these teachers were most likely never held accountable for knowledge of language, literature, culture, linguistics, and language-specific methodology. Additionally, these states have not mandated a set level of oral proficiency for certification in a foreign language. Is it fair to expect these teachers to implement the most effective practices if they have not had the opportunity to experience them as language learners and prospective teachers?

In light of this study’s findings, it is clear that post-secondary faculty need to assist prospective foreign language teachers so that they are confident using the target language frequently both within and beyond the classroom. According to Veléz-Rendón (2006), “language learning is a long, complex process and much of language acquisition happens outside the confines of the classroom, therefore candidates must seize every opportunity available to them to enhance competencies” (p. 331). Since half of all teachers, regardless of the state, reported that their proficiency had not improved following certification, all language teachers should be encouraged to transcend the artificial classroom boundaries and consistently seek additional exposure to the target language. Perhaps, taking advantage of technology to design professional development opportunities specifically for language teachers could assist them in improving their proficiency level. Furthermore, these opportunities may also provide teachers with the necessary support from other educators as they continue to improve their language skills and alter their instructional practices.

Although professional development is essential in influencing effective instructional practices, there must be a concerted effort to improve both traditional
and alternate route foreign language teacher education programs. Should prospective teachers be held to the same academic rigor regardless of the pathway to certification? How might this affect teacher licensure in states like Mississippi and Alabama where there is a high demand to fill foreign language teaching positions? Will there be enough “warm bodies” in these classrooms if alternate- and endorsement programs require a demonstration of oral proficiency and knowledge of language, literature, culture, and linguistics?

Improving foreign language teacher education relies not only on the active participation of faculty responsible for preparing these teachers, but also upon the states that grant them certification. Beginning with state-level mandates, Huhn (2012) underscored the importance of setting the standard of oral proficiency, and this very requirement might be one of the initial steps in improving foreign language teacher preparation in these states. Additionally, given these teachers’ lack of confidence using the target language as well as their assessment of their preparation programs, it is evident that those responsible for foreign language teacher education must restructure the programs leading to certification. In order to reframe foreign language programs, it is essential to highlight that language courses at all levels must continue to emphasize communication. Wilkerson, Schomber, and Sandarg (2004) emphasized this very notion and asserted that “the standard undergraduate language curriculum must be reexamined to determine if higher-level proficiency elements are incorporated into classroom goals and activities” (p. 39). Since teachers reported feeling ill-prepared with regard to listening and speaking, many post-secondary faculty are clearly not addressing the communicative goals of language instruction. Furthermore, it can be assumed that given their dearth of cultural knowledge, those responsible for preparing these teachers may not have recognized the vital role of the National Standards at the post-secondary level.

Although there is much progress to be made, improving foreign language teacher preparation is a worthwhile endeavor. Not only does the level of oral proficiency impact the instructional practices of language teachers, but it also directly influences student language development. Chambless (2012) underscored this crucial fact and contended, “it seems reasonable to assume that students would probably not advance in oral proficiency beyond the level of proficiency of their teachers” (p. S156). By using the Program Standards to reframe foreign language teacher preparation, we can assist teachers in reaching set proficiency levels, focus on the three communicative modes, provide them with the fundamental content knowledge regarding linguistics, literature, culture, and methodology, and at the very least, we can prepare them for the communicative demands of the 21st century language classroom.

Notes

1 It should be noted that the ACTFL/NCATE Program Standards are currently under revision and will be available in Fall 2013.

References


Staying in the Target Language While Teaching Middle School and High School

William Worden
University of Alabama

Abstract
This article advocates the use of the target language at all times in the classroom at all levels of language instruction. While addressed specifically to middle school and high school teachers, the article suggests an approach to language instruction that can be implemented for students of all ages. After recounting how the author's experience teaching high school students convinced him to teach exclusively in Spanish, the article then addresses possible objections to the instructional method, presents topics to cover when teaching Day 1 of Level 1 of a language, and discusses ways to help students thrive in an all-target-language classroom.

Introduction
Levine begins his 2003 article examining student and instructor attitudes toward the use of the target language in the classroom in the following way:

There are likely few foreign language (FL) instructors who have not developed an individualized approach to classroom target language (TL) and first language (L1) use. This approach can be influenced by pedagogical training, knowledge of the second language acquisition (SLA) literature, official policy, and classroom experience, yet often it appears to be based primarily on classroom experience and intuitions about what feels right (p. 343).

Indeed, there is no consensus among SLA experts and FL teachers concerning how much teaching should be done in the TL and how much L1 is appropriate to include during instruction. Clearly, we have moved well beyond the days when FLs were routinely taught in English using the grammar-translation method. Just about every FL teacher would agree with regard to instruction in the TL that “more is better.” Yet exactly how much TL should be used in the classroom remains a subject of debate.¹ In its Position Statement on Use of the Target Language in the Classroom, ACTFL states:

The pivotal role of target-language interaction in language learning is emphasized in the K-16 Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century. ACTFL therefore recommends that language educators and their students use the target language as exclusively as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction during instructional time and, when feasible, beyond the classroom (p. 1).
Though it provides some useful guidance, ACTFL’s recommendation that teachers and students “use the target language as exclusively as possible” is most certainly interpreted in different ways by different FL teachers. For some, 90% TL use serves as a sort of standard to aspire to, even though it may seem to be an unreachable goal. Other teachers undoubtedly focus on the “plus” of the recommended “90 plus” TL use, and consequently choose to teach their classes entirely or almost entirely in the TL. In the pages that follow I will discuss how my own approach to TL use in the classroom evolved over time and offer some thoughts on ways to teach entirely in the TL at any level of instruction.

How Much Target Language Should I Use?

I began teaching high school Spanish in the early nineties and, like many middle school and high school language teachers, used both English and the TL (Spanish, in my case) when teaching. My first year I taught Spanish One using half Spanish and half English; in my Spanish Three class I spoke roughly 70% Spanish and 30% English. My second year teaching I decided that I would use even more Spanish, and consequently taught Spanish One using 60% Spanish and 40% English, and Spanish Three using 80% Spanish and 20% English. My basic approach for those two years was to begin each class in Spanish, do much of the instruction in Spanish, and resort to English at certain specific times such as when students did not seem to be understanding the lesson, when I needed to explain a difficult grammar point, or when I was discussing logistics related to upcoming assignments or our class schedule. At the time I was pleased to be speaking primarily Spanish in the classroom and became convinced that I had reached the upper limit of what my students could handle in terms of hearing input in the TL. My intuition told me that stretching to use even more Spanish in the classroom would be counterproductive and result only in frustrated students and less language learning.

My method of instruction changed radically the following year as the result of a chance encounter with an experienced Spanish teacher I met at a summer workshop for FL teachers. While having lunch together, this teacher and I discussed our schools and our approaches to teaching Spanish. I explained that I used more Spanish than English in my teaching and that I was teaching both first and third year Spanish classes. She explained to me that she taught only Spanish One, and when I asked about how much Spanish she used in the classroom, she answered: “I teach Spanish in Spanish.”

“Of course,” I replied, “I speak Spanish a lot as well. But what percent Spanish would you say you speak in class?”

“One hundred percent.”

“In Spanish One?”

“In Spanish One.”

“Even the first day?”

“Even the first day.”

“You never speak English?”

“I never speak English,” she confirmed.

My first reaction was amazement. I was impressed that it could be done and curious about how she managed instruction, discipline, etc. while speaking only
Spanish. But this lasted only for a moment. The next moment my thought was (and I believe this is a thought shared by many FL teachers) “OK, you speak only Spanish to your students. But if you had my students, you wouldn’t be able to do it.” She could teach using only Spanish, I decided, because her students must be better than my students. I figured that she probably taught little children, because you can do anything with little children and they just go with it. Or maybe she was a college professor, because mature, serious college students could handle an all-TL environment. Finally I imagined that the only other possibility was that she worked at a prep school populated by motivated and high-achieving students.

In order to confirm my suspicions – and convinced that her answer would make clear the superiority of her students over mine – I then asked her what kind of school she taught at and what her students were like. Her response, quite simply, was “I teach at a middle school.” I was not prepared for this answer. In fact, of all the possible answers she might have given, I considered this one the least likely of all. It made no sense to me. “Do you teach at a middle school for superheroes?” I asked. “Do you teach at a gifted and talented middle school?”

“No. It’s just a regular public middle school with average students.”

“Wow,” was all I could manage to say. She taught Spanish One entirely in Spanish to middle school students. I believed her, but still could not fathom successfully teaching entirely in the TL with students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. “How do you do it?” I asked. “Let’s say it’s the first day of class and you say to your students ‘Open your books to page five and do the first exercise at the top of the page. Work with a partner.’ How do you get your students to do that if they don’t understand any Spanish?”

In response to my question she quickly stood up and grabbed the textbook that was next to her. “Abran el libro ahora [Open your books now],” she said, as if she were teaching the class at that very moment. While saying these words she showed me the book and opened it. “Vamos a la página cinco [We are going to page five],” she continued. As she said this she held out her fingers and counted saying “Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco [One, two, three, four, five].” Then she opened the book to page five, showed me the number five on the page, and pointed to Exercise One saying, “Vamos a hacer este ejercicio, el primero [We are going to do this exercise, the first one]. Vamos a trabajar con un compañero, un amigo [We are going to work with a partner, a friend].” As she said these last words she pointed to imaginary groups of two students, and gestured to show that they would be working together. She also appeared to be drawing something on an imaginary blackboard to help reinforce what she was saying. All of these words and actions were presented enthusiastically, making me think that the students in her class most likely enjoyed having her as their teacher.

As she finished this brief teaching demonstration, I realized that my relationship with the TL had just been changed forever. My focus when thinking about my own teaching had been almost entirely on the language of instruction; my conclusion had been that since first year students would not understand the Spanish that I spoke, there would be very little successful communication in the classroom. This experienced teacher, however, had convinced me that there was much more to communication in the classroom than simply the words being spoken. With her imaginary mini-lesson presented over lunch, she had shown me that the TL is only one of the many tools we can use to communicate with students. We FL teachers can also use, in
fact, should also be using, our tone of voice, body, gestures, the blackboard, in short, anything at all that will help students to understand what we are trying to communicate. In just a minute and with only this demonstration of how she teaches on the first day, this teacher convinced me that her method of teaching was superior to mine.

In the eighteen years since that lunch meeting (during which I taught three more years of high school Spanish and now fifteen years of all levels of college Spanish) I have taught entirely in Spanish in all of my classes. Is English allowed, ever, in my classroom? Yes, it is. There is English in the textbook I use, at times in handouts I distribute, and occasionally on the board (where I do sometimes write words in English). I do not, however, ever speak English in class; I teach Spanish in Spanish. As I conclude these introductory remarks I want to make sure that the point of this article is clear. I am not advocating here that FL teachers in middle school and high school speak more in the TL when teaching. I am advocating that FL teachers speak exclusively in the TL in the classroom.

Possible Objections

There are a number of possible objections to the method of teaching entirely in the TL; in fact, some of them I had myself before my own conversion experience. I would like to briefly address four of the most common objections:

Objection #1: My students won’t like it

My first response to this objection is to agree: it’s true, some students, in fact, many students won’t like it, especially at first. But I don’t care. I don’t believe that Algebra teachers shy away from teaching Algebra because some students don’t like it. More than that, I am convinced first that teaching in the TL is the best way for students to learn, and second that many students do, in fact, enjoy classes taught only in the TL. I have never had – and surely never will have – a high school student explain to classmates in front of the class that he or she actually likes that I speak only Spanish in class. I did, however, occasionally hear this opinion from students in one-on-one conversations before or after school. 

Students adapt to the classroom experience presented to them by the teacher. In fact, we FL teachers have a unique opportunity when we teach first year FL students. Though children know from very early grades what happens in an English class or in a Math class, they are typically introduced to language study in this country only in middle school or high school. So when we choose to teach first year FL classes entirely in the TL, students are apt to conclude that languages are simply taught that way. In my own experience, for example, third year Spanish students found it somewhat difficult to deal with my use of only Spanish after they had become accustomed to two years of English instruction as part of their language classes. First year students, on the other hand, almost always accepted my teaching style without questioning it at all. I do not mean by this that they always understood everything I said in Spanish, because they certainly did not. Rather, my first year students simply considered my all-TL instruction as just another unchangeable aspect of their classroom environment, something to be dealt with rather than changed. Our room had desks that couldn’t be moved, and was taught by Señor Worden, the FL teacher who always spoke Spanish in class. Students understood that our class just worked that way.
Objection #2: My students can’t do it

This is what held me back during my first two years of teaching. I knew that with some students the all-TL instruction method could work, but was sure that my own students couldn’t handle it. In an article focusing on student and teacher perceptions and beliefs about FL instruction, Gregory Thompson writes: “If teachers believe that languages are learned a certain way, their behavior will reflect that way of thinking in spite of possible research and training to the contrary” (p. 537). I know that this was true in my own case. During my first two years of teaching I was convinced that English needed to be a part of my FL instruction. When I switched to using only Spanish during my third year of teaching, however, I found that my students thrived in this new instructional environment. I wish there had been a linguist in my high school classroom conducting a study on student learning both my Year 2 of teaching (when I spoke both English and Spanish) and Years 3, 4, and 5 (when I spoke only Spanish). Though there was no official analysis done on my students, I know that once I started teaching only in Spanish I had fewer discipline problems, more student interest in the language, and better student reading, writing, speaking, and understanding of Spanish. And all of this occurred in the same school with the same students I had been teaching in my combination of English and Spanish; the only change had been in my own method of instruction.

Objection #3: The method won’t work; there will be too much my students won’t understand

There is most definitely a degree of faith that one must have in order to teach entirely in the TL, a faith that the approach is valid and that, even though there will be many moments when students are confused, maintaining an all TL learning environment is an important and worthwhile goal while teaching. Without that faith, a teacher is faced with the constant temptation to switch to English. I think that to make the all TL instructional approach work one must both acknowledge that students will often be unsure of what is being communicated and believe that this lack of comprehension is an acceptable result of the instructional method.

When I began teaching entirely in Spanish I noticed that some classes seemed to go really well, others just okay, and others not too well at all. This was, in fact, no change from how my classes had gone when I taught using both English and Spanish. Surely this happens to all teachers of all subjects; we know that not every class will be perfect and that not everything we say will be clearly understood by our students. Yet somehow FL teachers— like me in my first two years— have this utopian idea that switching to English will result in perfect comprehension by students. If only I teach in English, the thought process goes, I can more quickly, easily, and clearly communicate what I am teaching so that the students will understand it perfectly. But this line of thinking ignores several important points. One is that even speaking English does not guarantee that students will learn what we are trying to teach. Another is that I have become convinced that switching to English can communicate to students one or more of the following ideas: 1) As the teacher I don’t believe you are smart enough to understand my use of the TL; 2) English is needed for important communication, like grammar explanation, while the TL is good just for fun things like colors, numbers, and songs. Clearly these are not messages we want to convey to our stu-
dents. Moreover, I now think that much of my teaching for the first two years, when I switched back and forth between Spanish and English, was perceived by students in the following way: “Blah, blah, blah, blah…” (which is what students processed as I taught in Spanish), followed by their paying attention when I announced: “So what I just said is that the verb ‘ser’ is used to express…. ” I believe I was training my students to wait out my Spanish and simply start tuning into me when I finally switched to English. Once I taught only in the TL, this no longer became an option for students.

My attitude toward student comprehension of the Spanish I use in class also changed when I made the switch to teaching entirely in Spanish. I remember during my first two years of teaching thinking at times: “These poor students. There is no way they can understand all of the Spanish I am using. They must be frustrated.” I no longer think about student comprehension in those terms. Now I am more likely to think: “Clearly they won't understand everything I am saying in Spanish, but that's okay. They will figure some of it out now, and some of it out in the future. It's fine that they do not have 100% comprehension.” Part of my reason for this change in attitude has come from simply spending a lot of time with high school students. I remember, for instance, on several occasions talking to certain students before or after school about their interest in videogames. On a number of occasions I would ask students: “How do you even know what you're doing in the game? Do you read an instructional manual before playing?” The students would simply laugh at my questions and respond: “We don't know what we're doing at first, but we just figure it out.” I have faith in the ability of middle school and high school students to figure things out, and one of my goals as a FL teacher is to teach entirely in the TL in an effort to help my students figure out Spanish.

In my current position as the Spanish Program Director at the University of Alabama, I am responsible for the training of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who teach both Introductory and Intermediate Spanish classes. To help these students in their own teaching I emphasize two points:

1. GTAs must use the text and the syllabus we provide for them, likewise they are to follow the guideline that the only language of instruction we use in our program is Spanish.

2. The same building where we teach most of our Spanish classes houses the English Language Institute (ELI), which teaches English to hundreds of foreign students each year. A typical English Language Instruction (ELI) class might have a student from South Korea, another from Germany, another from Peru, several from Saudi Arabia, etc. The very capable ELI instructors who teach these students spend no time at all wondering what their language of instruction should be. They teach English in English. I tell our Spanish GTAs that like these ELI instructors, their job is to teach Spanish in Spanish.

Objection #4: My level of speaking in the target language is not high enough for me to do it

This is the objection that I best understand, because when I began using only Spanish in the high school classroom my level of Spanish was good, but not great. I was a high school teacher with reasonable Spanish, but there were still many things I wasn't entirely comfortable expressing. I could communicate fairly well with my
students, but not consistently at a very high level. What I learned when I switched entirely to teaching in the TL is that the change helped me to improve my Spanish. The act of speaking Spanish all the time for five class periods a day had a positive impact on my speaking ability.

The kinds of reasons that I found for not speaking in the TL at all times during class are shared by many other FL teachers as well. In an article titled “Student Teachers’ Attitudes and Beliefs About Using the Target Language in the Classroom,” Bateman (2008) notes of the student teachers she studied:

Although a number of factors were mentioned [as inhibiting the ability to teach in the TL], six were particularly salient in participants’ questionnaires and written reflections, indicating concerns about (1) classroom management, (2) lack of time, (3) linguistic limitations of nonnative teachers, (4) teacher fatigue, (5) building rapport with students, and (6) avoiding unfamiliar vocabulary (p. 18).

As a first- and second-year FL teacher, I also worried about these kinds of issues, deciding, for example, that using English would help me go more quickly through the material or that it would help lower discipline problems in class. Only when I switched entirely to Spanish did I realize that I could teach even more effectively entirely in the TL. As for my way of handling classroom management issues, when I saw a student misbehaving during class I would approach and say “Háblame después de la clase [Speak to me after class].” Then, when class was over, I would address the discipline issue with the student.

An Approach to Teaching Day 1 of Level 1

I used to begin teaching Spanish One on the first day saying something like: “Buenos días estudiantes. Yo soy el maestro de esta clase y durante este año vais a aprender mucho español [Good morning students. I am the teacher of this class and during this year you are going to learn a lot of Spanish].” Then I would switch to English saying something like: “Don’t worry if you don’t understand everything I’m saying. Little by little your comprehension of Spanish will improve as time passes. I’m Señor Worden and I’m happy to be teaching you Spanish this year. Now let’s talk about the policies and guidelines for this course…”

When I switched to teaching only in Spanish, I radically changed my approach to the first day of class as well. My goal was to start class in a way that would show students that they could make sense of what I was saying even though I was speaking entirely in Spanish. I did not expect 100% comprehension, but I did want to demonstrate to students that they could understand important aspects of what was being communicated to them in the TL. As students came into class I would be waiting outside the door of my classroom (I wanted students to have the full effect of my speaking only Spanish, so didn’t want to be in the classroom speaking English before class). As the bell rang I would walk into my new Spanish One class and begin speaking. I would say, entirely in Spanish: “Welcome to our Spanish Four class. I am Mr. Worden and I am happy to be here with you. Since this is a Spanish Four class (and at this moment I would write Español 4 on the board and hold up my hand with four fingers), I know that you understand what I am saying. This class will be a great opportunity for you to perfect your Spanish listening, reading, writing, and speak-
ing skills. You will also learn a lot about the many interesting cultures found in the Spanish-speaking world.” I would say this whole introduction to the class purposely at a rather fast pace; then I would stop speaking and smile at the students.

By this point students would be looking around at each other and reaching into their backpacks for their schedules in an attempt to figure out how they had ended up in the wrong class. Some brave student would raise his or her hand and say “I thought this was Spanish One.” I would pretend not to understand, so some other student would say “Uno, uno…” and another would maybe hold up one finger. I would repeat “uno” to let students know that I understood this, but continue to seem confused by all this and insist, in Spanish, that this was most certainly a Spanish Four class. After some more back and forth with students – and in doing this over the years I have found that some students find this all quite humorous while others seem panic-stricken – I would eventually pretend to look at my own schedule and say, of course in Spanish: “Spanish One? Not Spanish Four? Oh, this is a Spanish One class?” Even the first day of class some students would respond to this and say “yes” or “sí” or simply repeat “uno.” Hearing this, I would shrug my shoulders and hold out my hands in an apologetic fashion. I would then go to the board, erase Español 4, and replace it with Español 1. Next I would look back at the students and say: “Lo siento mucho. Ha sido mi error. Sí, sí, mi error. Ésta sí es una clase del primer año de español [I’m sorry. It has been my mistake. Yes, yes, my mistake. This is a first year Spanish class].” At this point students would relax a bit and start putting their schedules away. I could see that they were relieved that the confusion had been cleared up and that they were indeed in the proper class.

My next step was to pause. I just paused and looked at the students. They looked at me. I looked at them. Nothing happened. No one spoke. And then, after ten, maybe twenty seconds, I began speaking in Spanish (yet again at a purposely rapid pace), saying: “Welcome to our Spanish One class. I am Mr. Worden and I am happy to be here with you. Since this is a Spanish One class (and at this moment I would point to the Español 1 on the board and hold up my hand with one finger), I know that you understand only a little of what I am saying. This class will be a great opportunity for you to develop your Spanish listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. You will also learn a lot about the many interesting cultures found in the Spanish-speaking world.”

What was I trying to accomplish with this odd introduction to the class? A number of different things. Most importantly I wanted students to realize that they could make sense of what I was communicating even though I spoke entirely in the TL. Of course, I was working with more than Spanish. I used the board, my hand to show numbers, gestures (such as my apologetic shrug), and cognates (such as clase and error). I also pretended not to understand when a student said “I thought this was Spanish One,” and responded only when I heard “uno.” Even though I speak entirely in Spanish and only respond to Spanish, in every class I have ever taught students have grasped the initial situation (that somehow it seems that they are in the wrong class), worked with me to resolve the problem, and understood in the end that the initial confusion was the result of my mistake, not their mistake. The pause, once it’s all figured out, is purposeful on my part. I believe that during the pause students might be thinking: “OK, so he just figured out that he’s in a Spanish One class and he
knows we don't understand him. Now for sure he's going to speak to us in English.” This is the point, of course, after the long pause, when I simply continue in Spanish speaking at the same rapid pace I used when it seemed that I thought we were in a Spanish Four class. I want students to get the message that as the teacher I know we are in a first year class, I know they will not understand much of what I say, and despite all of that I will be teaching in Spanish all the time. As the class continues I do slow down the pace of my Spanish just a bit, and repeat myself when necessary, but the single most important purpose of this whole introduction is to show students that in this class we can and will successfully communicate in the TL.

I dedicate the rest of the first day of class to an aspect of FL study that allows first year students to learn something that clearly shows them that they are already making progress in the TL: pronunciation. Since pronunciation is first and foremost about sounds, I teach it with the book closed. I want students to focus on the sounds they are hearing and making rather than on how this new language uses letters to represent those sounds. I don't even start with words, just noises. I will grunt, for instance, and say Repitan [Repeat]. I will whistle, or screech, or make other odd sounds and ask the students to repeat the sounds. Then I ask students to repeat other sounds they hear. I will clap my hands and ask students to reproduce the sound. I will stomp my foot or drop a book and ask students to make the sound they hear, praising a student who reproduces it well. I will also take a sheet of paper, wave it in the air, and ask students to reproduce the sound. Inevitably, some student will take out a sheet of paper and wave it in order to match the sound, but I say, while pointing to my mouth: “No, no. Tienes que usar la boca [No, no. You have to use your mouth].” When a student successfully manages to pronounce the sound of waving paper, I congratulate him or her, saying: “Muy bien. Impresionante. Tú hablas papel [Very good. Impressive. You speak the language of paper].” We do eventually move on to sounds that exist in Spanish, but the whole first day is taught with the book closed.

Considerations Outside of the Classroom

The year I switched to teaching entirely in the TL, I realized that I would need to reach beyond my students to other constituencies in order for my teaching method to succeed. This may not be necessary at other schools, but in my high school I was the only teacher who taught entirely in the TL and I didn't want this to cause problems that could be avoided. One of my first steps was to talk to the guidance counselors. My message to them was the following: “I will be teaching entirely in Spanish this year, and some students could be so intimidated that they might want to drop my class. Please encourage them to stay in my class, convey to them that I am aware that they don't understand everything they say, and ask them to give the class at least another two weeks.” What happened that first year of teaching entirely in the TL? As expected, about five juniors from each of my Spanish Three classes talked to their guidance counselors saying that they needed to get out of my class because they couldn't understand what I was saying. After encouragement from these guidance counselors, the students decided to stick it out a while longer. In the end, none of these students dropped the class. Not a single Spanish One student went to a guidance counselor seeking to get out of my class. Some of this is undoubtedly because freshmen know less than juniors do about things like making appointments with
guidance counselors and dropping classes. Still, I believe that at least part of the reason that the Spanish One students showed less anxiety when immersed in the TL is because as new FL students they simply accepted that Spanish was taught in Spanish.

I also talked to the school’s principal, an active and involved man who would often walk around the school looking in classrooms to see what was happening in class. My message to him was: “I will be teaching entirely in Spanish this year, and I will be doing more communicative activities as part of my teaching than in the past. This means that when you look in my classroom it might seem chaotic. You might see students paired off doing an oral activity from the book. Students might be in bigger groups, talking, writing, and working together. At times you will see students walking around the classroom interviewing each other. You most certainly will hear students saying ‘No entiendo [I don’t understand]’ and ‘Repita, por favor [Please repeat].’ I hope you can accept that this focus on teaching and learning in the TL is all part of how I think Spanish should be taught.” Fortunately for me, the principal supported this approach to FL instruction.

One final group I communicated with was the parents, who at times expressed anxiety regarding instruction done entirely in the TL. What certain parents said to me about their children was: “I’m concerned that Johnny doesn’t understand your Spanish in class.” Though undoubtedly that was true, part of the implicit message at times was actually: “I’m concerned that Johnny is not going to get a good grade in your class.” This is understandable. When teaching high school I took a number of steps to help address these concerns. My syllabus was always in English and every assignment was written on the board or in a handout in English. This was done partly so that no student could say “I didn’t understand what Señor Worden said when he assigned the homework, so I didn’t do it.” I also always gave a vocabulary quiz on the third day of class. This might seem a bit early to give a quiz, but I found it quite helpful in my teaching. I even had parents tell me on Parent-Teacher night: “Sally was really nervous at the start of your class because you spoke only Spanish, but when she was doing well on the quizzes and tests, she realized she wasn’t totally lost.” As the FL teacher I know that students will not understand everything I say, but it’s harder for the students themselves to know how they are doing in class. Frequent tests, quizzes, and other graded assignments, starting very early in the semester, help students evaluate their progress.

The best forum I found for communicating with parents was the night early in the fall semester when they walk through their child’s schedule and meet all the teachers. At my school the parents would spend about five minutes in each class and maybe introduce themselves to the teacher on the way into or out of the classroom. For each class I would spend the first two minutes or so of my time speaking Spanish. I would say: “I am Mr. Worden and I am the teacher of this Spanish One class. I want you to know that during class I speak only Spanish, which I know can be difficult for first year students. I don’t expect your children to understand everything I say, but I think it’s important that students get a lot of input in the TL so…” I was fully aware that most parents understood little or none of my Spanish, but I thought it was important to give them an idea of what their child’s class was like and how I taught it. After speaking these first few minutes in Spanish, I would switch to English and say: “Since you are not my students, I will speak some English with you. But I want you to
know that during class with your children I speak only Spanish. I do not expect your children to understand everything I say, but think it important to…”

The first time I did this I was concerned about what parents might say to me as they left my classroom. I thought they might complain that my Spanish-only instructional method might be too difficult or frustrating for their children. What I learned through the years, however, was quite the opposite. Often after one of these sessions a parent leaving the classroom would say some variation of: “Mr. Worden, I’m Mrs. Smith, Mary’s mother. When I studied Spanish back in high school it was taught in English, and I can’t speak any Spanish at all. I’m happy that you’re trying something different with my daughter.” Not every parent, of course, praises my instructional method. But on these nights I heard overwhelmingly positive feedback from parents regarding my teaching entirely in Spanish. Most commonly they had themselves been high school FL students in classes taught primarily in English, were aware that instruction in English had not helped them develop communicative competence, and were open to a new approach of FL teaching. When the parents were accompanied by their child, I would try to say something in Spanish to my student as he or she entered or left the room. It was always amusing to have a short conversation with one of my students, watch the parents look on (often in amazement), and hear the mother or father say while leaving the room: “What did Mr. Worden ask you and what did you say?”

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with some thoughts from Martin Schwartz, a professor of cell biology who in 2008 published a short essay provocatively titled “The importance of stupidity in scientific research.” Professor Schwartz’s article deals specifically with the challenges faced by doctoral students in the sciences, but I believe that his arguments have real relevance for FL students and FL teachers as well. His essay begins by pointing out that a student pursuing a Ph.D. in the sciences must necessarily undertake a research project that seeks to discover something new, and that consequently the student often feels stupid because he or she daily faces questions to which there are no known answers. Schwartz writes: “What makes it difficult is that research is immersion in the unknown. We just don’t know what we’re doing” (p. 1771). Likewise in a FL class our students very often – especially at the beginning – just don’t know what they are doing. Schwartz’s essay encourages science professors not to help their students avoid uncertainty, ambiguity, even stupidity, but rather to accept that not knowing is a necessary part of the process of scientific discovery. He writes of scientific researchers: “The more comfortable we become with being stupid, the deeper we will wade into the unknown and the more likely we are to make big discoveries” (p. 1771). In a similar manner I encourage FL teachers to allow their students to embrace the difficulty, the uncertainty, the complexity of learning a new language. Teaching entirely in the TL does indeed make our students feel stupid at times, but I have become convinced that it is also the best way to help them move beyond the unknown and into a true understanding of the new language.
Endnotes

1 The first few pages of the 2009 article by de la Campa and Nassaji provide an insightful literature review on the topic of TL use in the classroom. The article references experts with a wide range of opinions, from those who see no place for any use of L1 during instruction to those who consider that excluding L1 entirely from the classroom is pedagogically unsound.

2 I think that at times we FL teachers overestimate the degree to which students do not like instruction in the TL. Levine's study found that college students do indeed have some anxiety with regard to TL use in the classroom. Nevertheless, he observes that “the data point to the possibility that instructors may perceive higher levels of TL-use anxiety among students (in general) than students themselves report” (p. 354). I found this to be the case in my own experience with high school students. The year that I began teaching entirely in Spanish did produce some anxiety in my students, especially the first few weeks, but this anxiety was less than I had anticipated.

3 With regard to how TL use impacts student anxiety, Levine notes: “students who reported higher TL use in their FL classes tended to report lower levels of anxiety about TL use. Correspondingly, instructors who reported higher levels of TL use in their classes tended to perceive lower levels of TL-use anxiety in their students. The important implication of this finding is that greater TL use may not translate into greater anxiety for many learners and that many students feel comfortable with more TL use when that is what they are used to” (p. 355). This conclusion supports what I found to be true in my own experience, namely that Spanish Three students (having previous experience with an English and Spanish instructional environment) displayed more anxiety with regard to my exclusive use of Spanish in class than did Spanish One students, who accepted more easily the 100% use of the TL in class.

References


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