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GUIDING LANGUAGE STUDENTS TO SELF-SUSTAINED LEARNING

by

Hyrum Boone Checketts

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

Logan, Utah

2019

ABSTRACT

Guiding Language Students to Self-Sustained Learning

by

Hyrum Boone Checketts: Master of Second Language Teaching

Utah State University, 2019

Major Professor: Dr. Karin deJonge-Kannan

Department: Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies

This portfolio is a compilation of written pieces which express the author's beliefs about excellence in second language teaching. The views expressed here have been shaped by the author's personal experience and by his time in the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program and are supported by relevant research throughout.

This portfolio contains three sections: (1) teaching perspectives, (2) research perspectives, and (3) annotated bibliographies. The teaching perspective section is centered on the author's teaching philosophy, which emphasizes communication in the target language, classroom community, and student motivation. The second section consists of three research papers written over the course of the MSLT program. The final section includes three annotated bibliographies that review research literature regarding student motivation, nonnative vs native teachers, and the teaching of vocabulary.

(148 pages)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACTFL = American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
CLT = Communicative Language Teaching
CS = Communicative Strategy
EFL = English as a Foreign Language
ELC = English Language Center
ELL = English Language Learner
ESL = English as a Second Language
FL = Foreign Language
L1 = First Language / Native Language
L2 = Second Language
MAVL = Mobile Assisted Vocabulary Learning
MSLT = Master of Second Language Teaching
NNS = Nonnative Speaker
NS = Native Speaker
SLA = Second Language Acquisition
SOPI = Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview
SFL = Spanish as a Foreign Language
TA = Teaching Assistant
TBA = Task-Based Activity
TESOL = Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TL = Target Language
TMVD = Technology-Mediated Vocabulary Development
TPS = Teaching Philosophy Statement
USU = Utah State University
WTC = Willingness to Communicate

INTRODUCTION

This portfolio is the culmination of my work and experiences from the last three years in the MSLT program. It outlines my beliefs about efficient second language (L2) teaching and learning and highlights topics of interest in L2 teaching that are especially important to me.

The centerpiece of this compilation is my teaching philosophy statement (TPS), which summarizes the roles I believe the teacher and the students should play in the language learning process, and how they work together to cultivate an ideal learning community in the classroom. In the TPS, I also demonstrate how my perspectives are influenced and supported by second language acquisition research.

The research perspectives and annotated bibliographies sections include papers on motivation, native vs. non-native teachers, communication strategies, pragmatics, and vocabulary. I chose to research these specific topics based on my experiences and challenges as a L2 learner and teacher, and therefore include practical, pedagogical implications in every paper.

TEACHING PERSPECTIVES

APPRENTICESHIP OF OBSERVATION

Throughout my years in public schools, I experienced and learned much about education and teaching, both as a student during hours and as a teacher's son in the nearly empty building after school. My father taught high school chemistry and I saw the numberless hours of work that teaching took outside of class, the lesson plans, assignment grading, the parental conflict, and the professional development. However, my mother taught me the most valuable lesson I have ever learned about teaching when I was only a child, and it was not about classroom management, survival skills when dealing with parents, or even how to plan detailed lessons; it was about people and relationships. She taught me the true meaning of the maxim, "teach people, not lessons." Whether it was demonstrating bread making to a neighbor, helping her teenage sons with an Eagle Scout project, teaching a formal sewing lesson as a visitor in the high school home economics class, or leading a group of 20 nine-year-old boys in a silly song or cheer, she was always truly interested in the people as individuals and was thus better able to support them and teach them than would have been possible without that personal connection.

In the third grade, this lesson was further engrained in my mind through the example of my teacher, Mrs. Griffin. She knew *me* and worked with me as an individual, all while teaching the subject matter efficiently and effectively to other individual students as well. To this day, much of what I learned in that class is still with me and I believe it no coincidence that the year of public school in which I consider that I learned the most is the same year in which I had the teacher who knew me best. I do not suggest that merely being good friends with the students is synonymous with good teaching

(some of my least noteworthy teachers have been very amiable) but the lessons being taught had more value for me as a student because they were presented to me as an individual, taking into account my emotions and concerns and interests, rather than being dictated by rote as if for later use in an encyclopedia article. My input, my contribution, my opinion, my progress, and my preferences mattered to my best teachers because to them teaching was about their students, not just the subject matter.

My first encounter with foreign language teaching was a forgettable one. In high school, I took Spanish for two years but never felt like the teacher really cared if we learned the language or not. The dry, boring cycle of new vocabulary lists, quizzes, memorized dialogues, and the same fruit and vegetable bingo cards every single Friday implied to me that he didn't really care about us ever actually internalizing or using the language to communicate with anyone. In fact, I often felt like he quite enjoyed the monopoly he held as the only Spanish speaker in the class. He demonstrated no enthusiasm, no desire to inspire or share, no interest in the students and their potential as language learners. Through that experience, my understanding about teaching as a human endeavor grew exponentially. I came to realize that without the fervor for helping and inspiring one's pupils, there is no motivation for self-evaluation or improvement as a teacher. If teaching is merely about the demonstration of the knowledge that one possesses to another, then the method of doing so is of little consequence. Furthermore, I learned that a teacher needs to have a passion for the language and a belief that the students can learn it to inspire and motivate their students to work diligently.

I began learning Spanish in earnest during my time as a volunteer, serving people in Nicaragua. Because I was surround by and invested in interacting with proficient

Spanish speakers, the language suddenly took on real meaning. I quickly came to see the language as a practical and beautiful skill which could connect me with millions of people who spoke it, rather than as a school subject I was forced against my will to study. That small shift in perspective radically changed my view of language learning and taught me the value of making language come alive for the learners. I realized that by making the language about unlocking communication with people and not just about vocabulary games and verb conjugations, a teacher could tap into our natural desire as humans to connect with each other to motivate students to learn and use the language.

In college, I had several language professors who demonstrated a clear investment in their student's learning and who, by extension, created courses that were inspiring and conducive to learning the target language. I had several Spanish literature courses where I became so absorbed in the material, the stories of people and their lives, that the language faded to the background and became almost an afterthought. Similarly, even in introductory Portuguese and American Sign Language classes, my teachers engaged me and my classmates in meaningful discussions and activities based on topics that I cared about and wanted to talk about. I was often so engrossed in the material that much of my anxiety about lacking linguistic skills dissipated before my overwhelming desire to express myself and make my opinion heard. I would read and discuss the stories or avidly debate a controversial topic and really only think about the fact that the medium of communication was my L2 when I had to pause and think about an unknown word or linguistic structure. Again, like my experience in Nicaragua, the desire to understand and articulate myself so overshadowed the morphology and pronoun placement that I felt uninhibited in using my limited language skills. Ironically, as I focused more on the

literature and discussion topics and less on grammar, my skills and understanding of the language actually increased. I learned from those professors that by engaging students in materials that are relevant and interesting to them, they more willingly and enthusiastically use the TL in meaningful communication, and thus improve their L2 skills. I saw that by presenting the language in a personalized, student-friendly form, effective language learning was promoted.

Through 20 plus years as a student, I have come to realize that good teaching, though its manifestation may differ slightly based the subject being taught or the context of the instruction, is guided by similar core principles and that it does not require a complex formula. As I have studied Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and American Sign Language in conventional classes, as well as in less formal settings, I have noticed that the same patterns and practices that characterize good teaching in chemistry, theology, or breadmaking also underpin quality teaching in language courses. Good teachers take into consideration their individual students' needs and goals, and make the subject matter come alive to the students. Effective language teachers do the same, especially helping students see language as the uniting, powerful communication tool that it is. Good teachers know their students and tailor the lessons and teaching styles to their students. Quality language teachers incorporate interesting materials for their students and draw their pupils into the content by using the language in meaningful ways, while simultaneously helping them see the functional context of grammar in natural language use. Good teachers are passionate about what they teach and transmit that fire for learning to their students. Successful language teachers do the same, as they act as living examples of the fascinating new language to their students and demonstrate its power to

overcome communication barriers and connect people. In short, as a student and observer of teaching for over two decades, I have come to understand that quality language teaching isn't so much about conjugations charts or flawless grammar explanations, but is rather *all* about passion, potential, and above all, people.

PROFESSIONAL ENVIROMENT

From a young age, I knew I wanted to be a teacher, but as I moved from one grade to the next, I just couldn't imagine myself being completely content teaching at those levels. During my freshman and sophomore years as an undergraduate student, I began peer-tutoring at the junior college I was attending and I was struck by how diligent and self-motivated students at that level were, especially the non-traditional students. I loved working with them and treasured my role as a resource, as an advocate, and as a fan rooting for their continued success. In large part due to that enriching experience and similarly fulfilling stints in subsequent years as a graduate instructor of Spanish, as an English teacher abroad, and as an intern at an adult community English center, my current goal is to teach Spanish at the college level and/or to teach adult learners of Spanish or English in some other setting such as community classes. The theories and points of views about second language acquisition that I espouse in this portfolio are therefore primarily focused on college age and adult second language learners of Spanish and English.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

Introduction

In my role as a second language (L2) instructor, my fundamental goal is to provide my students with quality language learning opportunities and tireless support, in order to maximize their L2 acquisition. In addition, I strive to equip them with solid language learning strategies that will help them succeed as L2 learners beyond the time that they are enrolled in my class. In this teaching philosophy statement (TPS), I will explain my views about excellence in L2 teaching and learning and demonstrate how I apply those beliefs in my language classroom to reach these goals. In conjunction with my beliefs about effective language teaching, I will cite second language acquisition (SLA) research literature that has shaped and supports these views.

I will begin by describing communicative language teaching (CLT), the open, dynamic, and cooperative style of language teaching that I consider essential to language use and acquisition. Next, I will describe my role as the instructor in helping to foster a collaborative classroom atmosphere and in organizing the course components. Subsequently, I will discuss the students' roles in co-constructing the communicative classroom environment and in making course decisions through honest self-evaluation and dialogue with me. I will include a section detailing what a standard class period in our classroom might look like, including my pre-class lesson planning, the tasks we carry out in class, and how my students and I work together to reach the learning objective for the day. I will conclude with a brief analysis of the role students' motivation plays in SLA and my responsibility in promoting that motivation in my classroom.

Communicative Language Teaching: Language's Value is in its Use

My primary objective when learning a new language is to use it to communicate with other speakers of that language, and many learners are motivated by similar aims. Surveys of college L2 students and other adult language learners have demonstrated that they similarly rank communication in work, travel, and social situations as some principal reasons to study a second language (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001; Bateman & Oliveira, 2014; Johnson, 2017). For me, unquestionably the greatest value of an L2 is in its *use*, so not surprisingly I am drawn to a teaching approach that prioritizes the development of learners' capacity for meaningful exchange in the TL (Ballman, et al.). I was introduced to CLT as a formal teaching philosophy while reading *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen* (Lee & VanPatten, 2003) as I began the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program at Utah State University. I was immediately drawn to this style of teaching that "has communication as its goal" (Lee & VanPatten, p. 1), and promotes meaningful production and use of the language by learners. In my subsequent years of study since that initial introduction, I have read more about the topic and have refined my understanding of both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical application of CLT.

My own teaching is directly influenced by the goals of communicative proficiency, as well as what is known today about the process(es) of SLA. Communicative proficiency denotes the functional ability to use a language for real-world communication, including a level of competence related to social norms, voice inflections, gestures, circumlocution of unknown words, and other cultural factors necessary to function capably in a communicative situation (Celce-Murcia, 2007; Swain, 1985). In applied terms, it means what a user can *do* with the language spontaneously in a

real situation in an appropriate manner. Savignon (1997) stresses that in SLA "the

development of the learner's communicative abilities is seen to depend not so much on

the time they spend rehearsing grammatical patterns as on the opportunities they are

given to interpret, to express, and to negotiate meaning" (p. xi) in the TL. The implication

of that statement for my classroom is clear: teaching and drilling grammar alone will

most likely not lead to proficiency, which can only be achieved through meaningful

interaction in and production of the language (de la Fuente, 2002; Lee & VanPatten,

2003; Swain 1985). Additionally, because my principal goal for my students is that they

be able to use the language in real-world situations, my language classroom is centered

on "perform[ing] global tasks or language functions in a variety of contexts" (Shrum &

Glisan, 2016, p. 247) in the TL. The ability to carry out these 'global tasks' is by

definition proficiency.

In addition to my goal for my students to acquire communicative competence, I

have chosen CLT as the basis for my Spanish classroom based on two premises about

languages and SLA presented by Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2001), and Lee

& VanPatten (2003): first, Spanish is not just a school subject but a living, dynamic

language with a myriad of practical communicative uses, and secondly, Spanish (like all

languages) is "in essence, unteachable" but rather is "acquired" by each individual (Lee

& VanPatten, 2003, p. 23). That is to say, only through first-hand interaction with and use

of the language can one 'acquire' a working knowledge and intuitive feel for the

language. In light of this, and because students are unlikely to use Spanish in meaningful

ways very much outside of class, we focus on using and interacting in the language as

much as possible during class time.

Learning Environment: My Role

Developing a comfortable, safe, and positive atmosphere in the classroom is an important factor in making communicative teaching work (Cook, 2016). A communicative approach to language learning, by its very nature, requires students to be engaged and interact, and the ambiance of a class is an integral part of students' willingness to participate in the process (Dörnyei & Csizér 1998; Naughton, 2006; Shrum & Glisan, 2016). From my own experiences as a student and teacher, I have seen the impact the instructor has on that atmosphere and I realize that a positive environment starts with me. Inviting, persuading, and encouraging students to increase their involvement is a good start, but there is more that I can do. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), for example, point to the relationship teachers develop with learners as crucial to a good classroom environment, asserting that "good rapport between the teacher and the students" boosts learner participation (p. 216). I build rapport by learning every student's name within a week of starting a new semester and encouraging them to learn each other's names as well. This familiarity among students helps them feel more comfortable when working in pairs and groups and increases their willingness to interact (Cao & Philip, 2006; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). I make an effort to welcome them, call on them, and say goodbye to them by name. Moreover, I give out a survey the first week of class to learn about their lives and interests and later make a point of asking them about their goings-on during class. Similarly, I include units throughout the semester that feature their interests. While these are generally recognized as good pedagogical practice for any class, they are especially beneficial for L2 classrooms (Arnold, 2011). Due to our communicative goals, it is fundamental that I help create a

community in which students willingly engage, and thus foster language acquisition (Todhunter, 2007).

My other indispensable role in creating a communicative environment is my continual use of the TL. It is commonly accepted that comprehensible input plays a central role in second language acquisition (Ellis, 2015; Krashen, 1982; VanPatten, 2017). Lee and VanPatten (2003) define input as "language embedded in some kind of communicative interchange" (p. 16) that the learner receives, and further clarify that for input to be comprehensible, the receivers must be able to understand the overall meaning of the message, even if they do not understand all of the grammar structures or even all of the lexical elements therein. As the instructor, I am likely the students' most consistent source of input in Spanish. For this reason, I implement a Spanish-only rule in my classroom and explicitly tell my class that I expect all of us, teacher, teaching assistants, and students, to abide by it. *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2012) recommend that everyone in the L2 classroom use the TL 90% (or more) of the time, and if I expect my students to even attempt such an ambitious goal, I *must* model the behavior. I find that classroom management in Spanish is at times the most authentic use of the language and very beneficial for the students. Explaining instructions before activities, talking about upcoming projects, and similar administrative duties in the TL are real-world uses of the language that provide authentic input for the students. Furthermore, using Spanish for all classroom interactions helps me avoid implying to the students through a "two-tiered system…that English is the more important language" (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001, p. 63). While I cannot obligate students to

speak in the TL, my constant example of doing so, combined with my repeated

invitations to do likewise can "encourage them to follow suit" (Ballman et al., p. 64).

Learning Environment: The Students' Role

An additional crucial element of a successful L2 class are the students who make

the classroom a cooperative, dynamic place of learning. While I may be the recognized

authority in the room, my students are the life blood of all that we do, the center of our

language learning goals. Through cooperative learning, I shift the focus from teacher

fronted to student-centered, in an approach that places interdependent responsibility on

students and teacher and "which combines active learning and social learning" especially

when students work with each other on tasks (Davidson & Major, 2014, p. 14). As I

stated earlier, my classroom philosophy is rooted in the understanding from SLA that

languages are in large part unteachable, but rather acquired (Lee & VanPatten, 2003;

Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Lee and VanPatten (2003) explain that each individual

develops an implicit linguistic system or interlanguage over time, a mental structure born

of experience and communicative language use, and built one layer and piece at a time.

This system is the subconscious knowledge of the language that the learner develops by

repeatedly hearing the "many subtle clues about the way language works" (Lee &

VanPatten, 2003, p. 16) embedded in comprehensible L2 input. Over time, the system

matures and develops to the point that the learner understands and recognizes the correct

usage of the target language. To use Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell's (2001)

metaphor, I cannot open a conduit from my head and transfer to the students the implicit

language structure that is in my own mind, but I *can* help them acquire their own.

Therefore, one of the students' main responsibilities is to pay attention and try to

understand the messages when I or others use the TL (Ballman et al.). It is especially

important that they ask when they don't understand or need clarification. To truly be

cooperative, the students and I must work together to arrive at an understanding (Lee &

VanPatten, 2003). Whenever students apologize because they do not understand, or have

"yet another question," I encourage them to continue asking for clarification as often as

they need.

Another significant role that students have in my class is the direction that they

provide through honest analysis of their own learning, and the format and content of the

course (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Little, 2007; Shrum & Glisan, 2016). Throughout a

semester, whenever a student comes to my office for help, I take the opportunity to ask

them about the course and what they would like to see adjusted or modified. I also give

out surveys asking the same thing to provide anonymity for more reserved students. I

have received insightful suggestions from the students and made adjustments to the

course accordingly, such as adding semi-structured, small-group discussions every Friday

and creating more aural comprehension activities based around videos of proficient users.

This dialogue is indispensable in truly making the course cooperative and involving

students as co-constructors of the learning process (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, &

Mandell, 2001; Dam, 2012). The class, after all, is for the students' benefit and as I allow

them reasonable control of the process and content of the course, they take ownership of

it and acquisition can increase (Little, 2007). In the classes leading up to the projects or

oral interviews (my primary forms of assessment), I pass out a list of the tasks that

students should have learned to do with the language in the form of can-do statements

(ACTFL, 2015). Based on the students' appraisal of their skills, I craft additional tasks in

which they can further use the language in those situations where they feel least confident. After assessments, I have students fill out a self-evaluation of their preparation, asking them to assess their study habits and their TL language use and make goals for achieving the upcoming learning objectives (Yang, 1998). As they honestly analyze their preparation, and as we discuss their progress together, we are both able to adjust our styles and habits to optimize language learning opportunities for them.

Designing Plans and Monitoring Tasks

As I approach planning and carrying out class activities each day, I begin with the same questions each time: 1. What practical language use(s) should we focus on that will be beneficial to the students? and 2. What can we do as a class to further the students' language acquisition? Task-based activities (TBAs) provide the answer to both questions. Task-based activities, in simple terms, are classroom activities focused on carrying out communicative goals (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001). Pica (1987) states that the social interaction most pertinent to L2 development "is that in which learners and their interlocutors share a need and desire to understand each other" (p. 4). Task based activities create that type of social interaction, making them ideal for fostering language acquisition. These activities are the core of what I plan for every class meeting.

Lesson Design

While students must indeed acquire the language on their own, I have the responsibility to carefully design tasks that maximize opportunities for student interaction within everyday communication tasks. Consequently, most of my role in the tasks takes place long before they are carried out in the classroom, much like an architect who draws detailed blueprints before the construction workers begin building (Lee & VanPatten,

2003). I begin my lesson plan by deciding on a clear communicative goal for the class. I

base my communicative lesson objectives on the design found in the *NCSSFL-ACTFL*

Can-Do Statements (2015) created, in part, to "provide learning targets for curriculum

and unit design" (ACTFL, p. 1). To provide an extended example of what my lesson

planning and classroom implementation look like, I will describe a lesson I have used

several times in which my students decide on a housing option for their family. The

overarching communicative goal for the whole lesson is: "Students can compare several

housing options and articulate which is the best for their family."

With my objective established, I examine what vocabulary and grammar

structures the students would need to carry out the task. Because grammar is never the

primary focus in the communicative classroom, I needed to ascertain only the points that

the students required to complete the task at hand (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell,

2001; Lee & VanPatten, 2003). In this particular lesson plan, I determined that the

students knew all of the grammar necessary, but that they were lacking familiarity with

many of the vocabulary words having to do with the house. I assigned them the words to

study on their own in the days leading up to class, but also designed two preliminary

activities that would focus on the rooms of the house and the furniture/appliances in the

house, to build up to the task of analyzing housing advertisements.

Activity 1: In this activity, each student had six cards with a room of a house on

each one (e.g., a bathroom, a bedroom). The cards were unlabeled so the students had to

deduce the room based on the items in them. Each card also had a colored mark on it.

Students circulated around the room and asked their classmates for rooms of the house of

a certain color, in order to form a complete house (six rooms, one of each: bedroom,

bathroom, etc.) all with the same color mark.

Activity 2: In this information-gap activity, the students worked in pairs, each partner

receiving a cutaway of a house with different furniture and appliances in his or her house

than that of his or her partner. The students asked each other questions about what

furnishings their partners had in the various rooms in the house, then wrote in the items

from their classmates' sheet until both partners had identical furnishings in their houses.

These two activities both served as valuable opportunities for the students to

communicate among themselves and acquire/reinforce lexical knowledge, and served as

stepping stones towards the culminating learning objective. Furthermore, the exchanges

between students, especially the information-gap activity, provided ample opportunities

for negotiation of meaning between the students, as well as with me and the TA. Brandl

(2008) underscores the benefits of interpersonal communicative tasks such as these which

require paired students to take turns talking and listening and, when communication

breaks down, to negotiate meaning. He defines negotiating of meaning as the opportunity

to "clarify misunderstandings, to repeat, to rephrase, or to follow up what has been said"

(p. 191) when mix-ups in communication occur, all strategies that will lead to further

understanding/acquisition and future use of the language. These interactions, with a focus

on meaning and communication, are at the core of students' developing communicative

proficiency (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001; Long, 1996; Swain & Lapkin,

1998).

Culminating Task: I next planned the central activity of the lesson. I knew that I wanted

to push the students to engage in a higher level of thinking than they had achieved in the

preliminary activities, so I planned a series of tasks that fell in the higher tiers of Bloom's

Taxonomy, specifically in the fifth and sixth levels of Analyze and Evaluate (Anderson &

Krathwohl, 2016). The students worked in groups of three and received a family profile.

After determining the housing needs of the family, the group wrote a brief description of

the ideal residence for that household. This step pushed them to think about, analyze, and

discuss a hypothetical situation, all in Spanish. Next, I gave every student an authentic

housing advertisement that I found on the internet and each individual assessed the

suitability of the house that they were given and then presented their findings to their

group. This was an ideal occasion for each individual to practice presentational skills, as

well as negotiation of meaning if their classmates did not understand part of their

explanation. In our preparatory activities, I had been sure to point out the alternative

words that they might encounter in their advertisement, including, for example, four

different ways to say bedroom in Spanish. This was not a case of providing too much

information, but rather careful preparation on my part to help the students succeed in the

task, since I had reviewed the authentic text and knew that all four forms of the word

would indeed arise (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). I also pointed out strategies to the students

for working through the advertisements, even when they did not know all of the words.

For example, I had them circle the number of bedrooms and bathrooms first, effectively

modifying the task to their linguistic level without editing the text (Shrum & Glisan,

2016).

　　　　After each student presented their housing option, the group collectively settled

on the option that best matched their ideal home. In subsequent steps, the groups looked

at a map of Managua (the city from which all of the housing options were taken) and

decided on a location in the city to locate their home, based on proximity to businesses, schools, hospitals, etc., and the needs of their family. The students were required to evaluate a situation and make a decision as a group, all through the medium of the L2. The group then decided on what their first purchases of furniture and/or appliances should be, based on their needs and the furnishings listed in the housing posts. To wrap up the task, each student used a chart to compare the ideal situation that they had envisioned with the reality that they settled on when faced with authentic options. I included this final step to provide a chance for self-reflection and evaluation of the process they had gone through, as well as to create a summative product demonstrating completion of the communicative task.

Task Implementation

During class, as the students are engaged in carrying out the task-based activities, the focus of the students is on their individual groups and the objective at hand. While I spend extensive time on the planning and preparation of the tasks, my in-class function is that of instruction-giver and ever-present resource. This is a departure from outmoded language classrooms where the class time was nearly all teacher-centered or worksheet driven, and it liberates me and my students to freely interact and collaborate using the TL (Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mandell, 2001; Little, 2007). I am free to move about the classroom, stopping by groups to offer suggestions or ask thought-provoking questions about the activity the students are carrying out. Students come to view each other, their books, their online dictionaries, as well as me, all as viable founts of information and support for task completion. As I break free from the weight of responsibility of doing all the lecturing, motivating, and information supplying *for* my students, I shift from being

the source of language to *another resource* to aid my students in their acquisition process (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). In this way, students begin to assume more and more responsibility for their own L2 learning, a skill that will serve them as lifelong language learners (Dam, 2012).

I also carry out a vital duty in managing the task-based activities as they unfold. It is my responsibility to clearly explain the instructions and to do so in a variety of ways to ensure that all students are clear about the expectations. For example, Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2001) suggest giving written and oral instructions to aid comprehension. Additionally, I find that modeling activities is a powerful tool to avoid confusion because a demonstration is often more valuable than a wordy explanation (Ballman et al., 2001; Shrum & Glisan, 2016). At the beginning of tasks, I emphasize to students what the goal is and what their outcome might look like. For example, in the case of the housing activity, I tell the students explicitly that our goal is to practice choosing the best housing option, while conceding ideals to accommodate for reality. I point out that they will be acquiring the skills of debating and compromising in the TL as they make a group decision. With these clear objectives, they feel additional motivation to complete the task well since the intellectual reward is apparent (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). They will see what they have to gain from the exercise in relation to their communicative proficiency.

In addition to assisting students and encouraging TL use, I carefully manage the time during tasks. I try to ensure that no single activity lasts more than approximately ten minutes and that we have simple yet dynamic moments between activities to refresh our minds. Brain research by Sousa (2011) indicates that learners benefit from lessons that

are broken into smaller blocks of time and advocates for eight-to-ten minute "learning episodes" (pp. 97-98). Additionally, Sousa cites studies suggesting that "going off task" (p. 99) between lesson segments with simple things, such as jokes, songs, or simple stretching, actually results in more time on task in the long run than if students are pushed to stay on task uninterrupted for the whole class period. Also, as Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2001) suggest, I like to end activities before everyone has finished to avoid having those who *are* done revert to conversations in English, as well as to give us time to review results, answer questions, and address some common grammar errors.

My Impact on Student Motivation

I believe that most goals are accomplishable if one is willing to work hard and efficiently enough and stick with it. Evidence in SLA research suggests that successful language learning *is* in large measure dependent on the tenacity and determination of the L2 learner, especially give the time required for L2 acquisition to occur (Hernandez, 2006; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; VanPatten, 2017). Second language learner motivation, the impetus that leads students to start and continue with the language acquisition process, has even been called "the most influential factor in successfully learning a new language" (Shrum & Glisan, 2016, p. 32). Motivation is extremely complex, but there is one fact about motivation that is especially relevant to me as an L2 instructor: because motivation in based on an "individual's thoughts and beliefs" (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 118), it is a dynamic force that changes over time. The fluid nature of students' motivation means that I have the potential to positively influence my students and possibly even help their motivation increase.

Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) assert that "skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness" (p. 207) in L2 classrooms. As a teacher, I consciously work to employ all of the techniques I know to maintain and increase my students' motivation to learn the TL, while accepting that they are ultimately responsible for their own motivation. As mentioned, I strive to know students by name and remember details about their lives. One of my core beliefs about teaching is that I teach people, not lessons. Personal rapport has been identified as one of the most effective ways that L2 teachers can help students maintain motivation (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini, & Ratcheva, 2013). Also, as I help students see progress from their efforts, their motivation to continue studying the language is buoyed. My use of Can-Do statements helps students to see their growth and to feel stimulated to keep working diligently.

Helping students to see the application of the language to their own lives is a particularly effective strategy that I use to help motivate students. Communicative Language Teaching is designed to develop everyday language skills, and I intensify that link to the world beyond the classroom by using authentic materials such as YouTube videos by fluent speakers, authentic Hispanic songs, recipes in Spanish etc. Such materials show the language for what it is: a real, vibrant, uniting system in which my students can take part. Hernández (2006) affirms that the use of these cultural artefacts in the L2 class helps to augment students' integrative motivation (desire to learn the language for purposes of interacting with fluent speakers of the language), which in turn has been shown to correspond to higher rates of oral proficiency.

Personal Example

Given that Spanish is my second language and that I have achieved a relatively high level of proficiency, conceivably the best motivation I can offer to my students is my personal example as a language learner. Among their 10 recommended strategies for teachers to help motivate their students, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) place the teacher's "personal example" of attitude and behavior toward the language and learning process as the top student motivator (p. 215). Thompson and Fioramonte (2012) stress that instructors who teach their L2 "should be open with their students about their own language learning processes so that their students can strive for the same level of competence" and that as L2 learner and user of the TL, they can be "excellent role models for [the acquisition] process" (p. 577). Rather than dwell on what I have not yet mastered in Spanish, I try to show the students that in spite of these gaps in vocabulary or cultural knowledge, I am a successful L2 user of Spanish and that they too can use their developing skills to be part of the Spanish speaking community. Furthermore, I am very open about using my resources to continue learning and improving in Spanish, such as asking more fluent users for clarification, using reliable websites for looking up unknown vocabulary or confusing grammar, and reading the news in Spanish. I believe that these practices and my openness make proficiency seem realistic and attainable, thus motivating the students to continue using and developing their budding skills. In addition, I trust that I am providing my students an effective model for continued language improvement outside of formal classes.

In like manner, I believe that the passion that I demonstrate for learning and using languages is a valuable contribution to my language classes. At times I get so

enthusiastic during class that I conceivably look a bit ridiculous bouncing about, acting out words, miming, etc. However, it is authentic enthusiasm for working with students and language learning in general, so I gladly wear it on my sleeve in hopes of inspiring my students. I may not always follow every pedagogical practice to a tee, or pronounce every word perfectly in Spanish, but I am unequivocally dedicated to language teaching and learning. As Yan (2009) reminds us, effective language teachers "are not necessarily the ones who are successful in the business of transferring cognitive information" but rather the "positive impact of good teachers is due to the strength of their commitment towards the subject matter and the ability to instill in students a similar willingness to pursue knowledge" (p. 111), and I would add proficiency in this context of language learning. Whether I help to plant the initial seed of desire or nourish the already growing enthusiasm and commitment to language learning, I succeed as a language teacher every time I strengthen in my students the desire to pursue and achieve language acquisition.

Conclusion

In summary, my personal teaching philosophy rests on three main principles. First and foremost, teaching is a human endeavor and therefore my first priority is my students: to know them; to recognize their individual goals; to desire, work, and cheer for their success; and to work in cooperation with them to achieve L2 acquisition. Secondly, learning another language is only as valuable as its use in true communication, and therefore my classes are centered on communicative proficiency. This has led me to embrace a form of CLT that I believe stimulates students to acquire the TL for immediate and practical use. Finally, because second language acquisition is complex, difficult, and often slow, I must help my students learn how to be autonomous learners, responsible for

and in control of their own learning, if they are to succeed in the long run (Lee &

VanPatten, 2003; Najeeb, 2013). This does not mean learning alone, but rather learning

to be self-motivated and self-directed in their sustained pursuit of knowledge. In short,

my aim as an L2 teacher is to help individuals to build robust, practical habits and

confidence for lifelong language learning that will lead to success in any language they

set out to acquire.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TEACHING OBSERVATIONS

Introduction

To me, one of the most satisfying parts of being an educator is the opportunity to continue focusing on the quality of my teaching and to see professional growth in myself as a language instructor. It is both stimulating and rewarding to learn about new and diverse approaches to language teaching, to pick from among them the principles and methods that I feel fit well within my personal teaching philosophy, and then to implement them in my teaching. In fact, even when I learn about new approaches that I do not personally plan on using, or that fall outside the methods that I have adopted, I find it fascinating to see the diversity within the field and to observe how each individual teacher succeeds in unique ways that fit his or her personality and circumstances. Conducting observations of other language teachers provides a nearly limitless source of these new ideas and insights into diverse methods in language teaching and serves as a proven means of valuable professional development (Cookes, 2003; Gore, 2013; Malu, 2015).

My Observations as an MSLT Student

Throughout my time in the MSLT program, I have observed a number of language teachers in action. I have observed instructors of Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and Mandarin, as well as English teachers in both ESL and EFL contexts. The majority of these were beginning- and intermediate-level courses, with an advanced ESL and one advanced Spanish class mixed in. Below, I will outline three examples of how my experience observing other language teachers has helped me grow professionally.

Teaching Grammar

Beginning with my first observations, I noted that many teachers approached grammar differently than I did. In one beginner-level language class for example, the teacher presented a lengthy explanation of interrogative words before the students began to practice using the target form in an activity with a partner. Another instructor that I observed taught the grammar form at length to explain some difficult concepts, comparing the form with the students' L1. During a third observation, I saw a teacher give out handouts with an explanation of the grammar needed for the day but not explain it in great detail verbally, an approach that more closely parallels my own. In all three cases, the students appeared to use the new concepts effectively during the subsequent activities in which they were incorporated. While I personally try to minimize the amount of class time I use for grammar explanations, and though I rarely use the L1 for the explanations, in all of the cases that I observed it seemed to work for the teachers and students. I noted that an advantage of the lengthier explanations was that students noted exceptions or difficulties with the new forms and brought them up before they began working on the activity, such that all of the students were able to hear the discussion and explanation from the teacher. This observation led me to ask myself how I could facilitate those same discussions without taking up as much valuable class time when I would prefer that the students were communicating with each other in the TL. I have subsequently used the online learning management system to post more videos and written explanations of the grammar needed for each day's task for students to use outside of class, and I sometimes have students do a brief activity in class, preparatory to the daily task, where they have to explain to each other (including in the L1 when needed) the *why* of the new grammar as they use it in their activity. I can go from group

to group and answer individual questions while the other students are still busy using the language. In this way, I have been able to reflect on the best of what I learned from my colleagues and adapt it to fit within my own classroom ideal.

Teacher-centered Activities

During observations, I encountered another theme that caused me to reassess my methods. In my own philosophy and practice of language teaching, I do minimal talking in front of the class, preferring that students work with groups or partners to expand their opportunities to use the language. While I view comprehensible input as paramount in the language acquisition process, I consider that my classroom management, my interaction with groups, students' online homework (specifically texts and videos), informal pre-class chatting with students, and peer input during class, all in the TL, minimize the need for me to do extensive teacher-centered activities in the name of giving my students comprehensible input. During a few of my peer observations, I noted that some teachers lead discussions and activities for larger portions of the class time than I tend to. One led a whole class discussion, several controlled each new activity for significant lengths of time before having the students talk to a partner, and another read the directions to a destination to the whole class while the students developed receptive skills by following the directions on a map. In these cases, the instructors placed a higher emphasis on teacher-produced input than I normally do, but the activities appeared to be beneficial to the students. Though I have not adopted this approach of leading long, teacher-fronted activities, and while I still view group or partner work as the ideal for the majority of language practice in my classes, the observations have been valuable to me as I have reflected on the need for input and scaffolding for students. In particular, as a result of

these observations I have been more conscious of providing short but clear modeling of possible ways of carrying out classroom activities and tasks. In this manner, I simultaneously provide comprehensible input and scaffold the students in the task I'm asking them to carry out, all while minimizing teacher talk. Students thus receive a dose of teacher input relative to the activity and grammar/vocabulary involved in it, but also move to the student-centered portion of the task as quickly as possible, where they themselves can experiment with and use the language with peers in the context of the activity.

Use of the L1

One of the key tenets of my own language teaching philosophy is a focus on use of the TL, not only as the objective of the course, but as the medium for teaching and communicating within the class. In several classes that I observed, the instructors used the L1 in ways that differ from my own vision of effective language teaching. In several cases, the instructors used extensive amounts of the L1 to explain grammar principles, and in one specific case, the teacher repeatedly translated (and encouraged the students to translate) the target language vocabulary and even full phrases to their L1 English, presumably to ensure comprehension. In other instances, in which I observed strategies that differed from my own, I nevertheless gained valuable insights into how to improve my teaching style and how to adapt the best components of others' teaching approaches to fit within my own philosophy. However, in the case of these observations with divergent uses of the TL, the value for me was in the recommitment I developed to my own approach and philosophy in contrast to the style I had observed. While these instructors may well have used the L1 abundantly with the best of intentions, I left feeling

that the students were being somewhat shortchanged in their language learning experience by the very people that they were paying to learn the language from. In most classes where I observed this approach, instructors were teaching beginning students and used the L1 extensively to support them as they developed fledgling skills. However, in these classes the students seemed to talk *about* the language more than they *used* the language, a habit that I feel most often leads to a disproportionate amount of explicit grammar knowledge and deficient real-world language skills and implicit feel for the language.

Far from condemning the use of the L1 as a tool for learning an L2, I support its use in small amounts in the classroom and even in extensive amounts when preparing and studying outside of class. Nevertheless, from these observations I was again reminded that if my goal is for learners to be competent users of the language, it must be the medium for communication in the classroom: not the subject of a systematic dissection through the L1, but the very vehicle for sharing ideas and information. I should note that in other classes, I observed instructors who very successfully taught and lead their class in over 90% TL, in a natural and comprehensible way, and those observations heartened me to continue doing the same. In both cases, my observations of others helped me reaffirm my commitment to my personal and professional values as a language teacher.

Conclusion

To be an effective professional as a teacher is to be a lifelong student of pedagogy and education. Through observing my colleagues' classes and analyzing their teaching, I have gained valuable insights into other perspectives and approaches to language instruction. These observations have helped to broaden my vision and have given me a

glimpse of the breadth of teaching styles and methods that others employ effectively in their own classes. In some cases, I have adapted and incorporated others' approaches, and in others I have rejected what I have observed and reaffirmed my own philosophy and style; in all cases, I have learned and grown as a professional. And as a language teacher, I am committed to continual, lifelong development through teaching observations.

SELF-ASSSEMENT OF TEACHING STATEMENT

In an effort to evaluate and improve my teaching, I video recorded myself teaching a 50-minute, Spanish 1010 (i.e., first semester) class which I later watched and about which I wrote a reflection. In addition, one of my professors and three of my colleagues attended that same class and sent me their observations. This paper is based on the integration of their observations and my own, compared and contrasted with my beliefs about good language teaching as expressed in my teaching philosophy statement.

In the comments that I received from all who observed my class, the observers were very complementary of my interaction and rapport with my students, noting that I greeted them by name as they entered the classroom, talked with them about their lives beyond the classroom, was attentive to their needs and questions during activities, and supported those who came in late so that they could get up to speed. In my self-observation notes, I also commented on my interaction with the students and how I felt that I helped them feel comfortable and supported in my class. Because I believe that this type of positive environment and support are essential in the language classroom, I was pleased that the video demonstrated that I was successfully creating that type of atmosphere. It was encouraging to see how the small efforts I made to genuinely take an interest in my students seemed to directly affect the mood of the whole class.

Another key to effective language teaching, in my opinion, is the extensive use of the target language in the classroom, especially by the teacher. I noted while watching the recording that I used Spanish nearly the entire class. The observers also noted my use of Spanish for all interactions and commented that, even a few weeks into the semester, I was able to guide the class effectively in the TL as I made an effort to make my language

clear and comprehensible for the students. Two observers also commented that the students, following my lead, made an effort to stay in the TL as much as they were able. I note in my teaching philosophy statement that the teacher's personal example is key to the classroom environment and a factor in motivating students to use the language, and the observations of my class seem to bear that out in this case. It is important to note that the video also showed that I have room for improvement with respect to making my language more comprehensible. I wrote in my notes that I needed to do more comprehension checks and speak more slowly at times and one observer also commented on the speed of my speech when I got excited. Two others mentioned my enthusiasm as one of my strengths, but clearly, I need to have a handle on that excitement if it begins to be detrimental to my quality of communication.

One aspect of my teaching which did not live up to the ideal that I express in my teaching philosophy is allowing students some degree of autonomy in determining the pace and flow of the class. One observer wrote that while the quick succession of short activities that I used was helpful for keeping students engaged, I seemed to arbitrarily move to the next activity just because 'it was time'. Similarly, another observer also noted that I asked students if they needed more time, but then continued on with the lesson without giving them much more when they asked for it. I realized while watching myself that at times I also tended to try to micromanage each group too much, rather than allowing them to take charge once I had given the general instructions. In that respect, I could do a better job of being an available resource rather than a director when students are engaged in a task. I believe these problems stem from a positive, but at times

misguided, desire to use time wisely and that I need to step back and listen to the students and their needs and adjust pace and approach accordingly.

Watching myself teach has been uncomfortable but has been valuable to me, especially when paired with observations from colleagues and professors. As I assess the positive and negative elements of my teaching practice and compare it with my own ideals, I feel a very strong desire to improve and reach that standard that I have set for myself. I believe that this system of self-observation and self-assessment is an effective way to avoid complacency and negative routines or practices.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

LANGUAGE PAPER

Improving Strategic Competence:

Teaching Communication Strategies in the L2 Classroom

INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTION

In the spring of 2017, I had the opportunity to spend a semester at The English Language Center of Cache Valley (ELC) as an intern, observing and helping in classes of all levels. I wrote this paper at the conclusion of that internship as part of an independent study with Dr. deJonge-Kannan and inspired by my experience at the center.

While helping at the ELC, I frequently noticed that among students with similar linguistic knowledge, some were better able to maintain a conversation and express themselves better than others. It quickly became clear to me that those students who were able to sustain a conversation employed a different skill set than those who, despite having similar knowledge of the language, were unable to do so. In this paper I explore the techniques that L2 learners use to maintain communication when faced with linguistic difficulties, known collectively as communicative strategies. It focuses specifically on the viability of teaching these strategies to help L2 learners become skilled communicators in the face of linguist limitations or situational difficulties.

IMPROVING STRATEGIC COMPETENCE:

TEACHING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE L2 CLASSROOM

Introduction

The study of communication strategies (CSs) has its origins in the works of

linguists in the 1970s (Savignon, 1972; Selinker, 1972), and research in the field

expanded rapidly following Canale and Swain's (1980) proposal regarding

communicative competence, with its subcategory of strategic competence. The

introduction of the ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines (1982) and the subsequent

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986), brought an even greater focus on oral

communication strategies in linguistic and pedagogical studies (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996,

2003). Soon, two main branches emerged in the research, focusing on themes that remain

important today: the classification of CSs and the "teachability of communication

strategies" (Dörnyei, 1995, p. 55). This essay will briefly address the classification of

CSs but is primarily focused on studies regarding the viability and benefits of teaching

these tactics to students in the L2 classroom. The objective of this review is to provide a

background to and practical suggestions for CS training to language learners, which L2

teachers can utilize as they help their students become competent communicators.

Background

Definition

The prevalent use of communication strategies by L1 speakers of all languages

highlights the importance of these skills in aiding smooth linguistic interaction and

exemplifies the potential value of studying and teaching CSs in L2 learning contexts

(Rabab'ah, 2015; Rich, 2004). However, answering the queries "What qualifies as a CS?"

and "How does one best classify the different types of strategies?" has been the work of

researchers since the term was first coined by Selinker (1972). Over the decades,

researchers have referred to these stratagems as a whole by a wide variety of

designations, from communicative strategies to compensation strategies to compensatory

strategies, not to mention the vast array of names given to individual tactics (Dörnyei,

1995; Rabab'ah & Bulut, 2007). The most prominent and inclusive term used in the

contemporary literature is communication strategies -- for that reason I will use that label

in this paper. As for what qualifies as a CS, I will adopt Corder's (1981) definition that

describes communicative strategies as "systematic technique[s] employed by a speaker to

express his meaning when faced with some difficulty" (p. 30). This definition highlights

two key parameters of CSs, "problem orientedness and systematicness/consciousness"

(Dörnyei, 1995, p. 56), which are broad enough to include many recognized types of

strategies but specific enough to eliminate the ambiguity of other classifications that

include *all* attempts to augment the effectiveness of communication. In other words, to

qualify as a CS in this paradigm, techniques must be conscious attempts by an

interlocutor to fix what he or she considers a communication problem.

Classification

Two decades ago, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) reviewed nine prominent taxonomies

of CSs, and in subsequent years even more variations of these paradigms have emerged

(Nakatani, 2005). Despite the wide variety of CS models, two salient perspectives of the

strategies can be discerned across the many schema: the interactional view and the

psycholinguistic view. The former is "based on the interaction process between language

users and their attempts to negotiate meaning to improve understanding" and the latter is

conceptualized "as the cognitive processes involved with a focus on comprehension and production" (Rabab'ah, 2015, p. 626). In other words, linguists who espouse the interactional view are more concerned with how interlocutors mutually arrive at an understanding and focus on the means by which the linguistically-lacking participant overcomes his or her language shortcomings in route to co-constructing meaning, such as asking for repetition, confirmation checks, etc. On the other hand, those who study the psycholinguistic orientation primarily "concentrate on lexical compensatory strategies and exclude other areas of strategy use" (Nakatani, 2010, p. 118) (e.g., circumlocution, paraphrasing, word coinage). As for dividing and categorizing CSs, the most commonly used strategy classification in the literature is the reduction vs. achievement paradigm (Dörnyei, 1995; Nakatani, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2015). Generally speaking, achievement strategies "present leaners' active behavior in repairing and maintaining interaction" while reduction techniques "reflect learners' active behavior as they try to avoid solving communication difficulties" (Nakatani, 2005, p. 81). As for individual strategies, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) detail over 40 varieties of CSs mentioned in the various taxonomies they review, such as the examples mentioned previously. However, an analysis of each of the specific strategies is beyond the scope of this paper.

Teaching Communication Strategies

Pioneers in the field of CSs mentioned the potential for CS training (Canale & Swain, 1980; Tarone, Cohen, & Dumas, 1977) and, in some cases even suggested ways to teach them in the L2 classroom (Faerch & Kasper, 1986). Despite the abundance of efforts to label and taxonomize the strategies in the early days, "far less attention [was initially] paid to the question of whether the strategies could be integrated into second

and foreign language teaching programs" (Dörnyei, 1995, pp. 55-56). Fortunately, an abundance of arguments, data, and studies that discuss CS training for L2 learners is available today.

To Teach or Not to Teach

The teachability of CSs and the necessity for CS instruction are by no means accepted by all researchers in the field. Those opposed to strategy training are "concerned with the underlying cognitive process, and have found many similarities between L1 and L2 learning" (Rabab'ah, 2015, p. 626), leading them to conclude that such teaching is not necessary since the learners are already adept users of the strategies as a result of their L1 competence. Furthermore, these researchers argue that since no new linguistic knowledge is involved and the "the cognitive processes are familiar from the L1" (Dörnyei, 1995, p. 60), there is no need for CS instruction. Kellerman pointedly concludes that "there is no justification" for CS training in L2 classes and that the duty of language instructors is to "teach the learners more language and let the strategies look after themselves" (as cited Dörnyei, 1995, p. 60).

In contrast, other linguists support the use of CS training for L2 learners, which they view as crucial for developing metacognitive awareness (Arteaga & Llorente, 2012; Faucette, 2001; Lam, 2010; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2010; Rabab'ah & Bulut, 2007; Rich, 2012). These researchers tend to agree that the learners have already developed CSs in their L1, but argue that alerting students to the value of the strategies as tools in the L2 is necessary if students are to utilize them frequently and efficiently. On the whole, those in favor of explicit CS teaching indicate that, when language learners gain an increased consciousness of strategies through training, they use them more, which in turn leads to

improved communication. Specifically, broad approaches to CS training (i.e., introducing a whole spectrum of techniques) help students to successfully use achievement strategies and at the same time avoid reduction strategies, the combination of which facilitates clearer and more sustained communication (Nakatani, 2005). Thus, awareness raising and practice of CSs can purportedly "provide the learners with a sense of security in the L2 by allowing them room to manoeuvre in times of difficulty" and consequently, "rather than giving up their message, learners may decide to try and remain in the conversation and achieve their communicative goal" (Dörnyei, 1995, p. 80).

CS Training: The Research Findings

Though the logic of those opposed to CS teaching seems sound in its own right, the evidence presented by those in favor of such training is impossible to ignore. Study after study testing the effects of CS training and awareness raising for L2 learners has produced qualitative and quantitative data pointing to CS instruction as a significant factor in increased strategy use and improved communicative competence (Dörnyei, 1995; Faucette, 2001; Lam, 2010; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2005; Rabab'ah, 2015). For example, in an early study on training EFL speakers in three specific CSs, Dörnyei (1995) found that students in the treatment group demonstrated a statistically significant increase in the quality and quantity of usage of two of the strategies taught. In more recent findings, Nakatani (2005), Rabab'ah (2015), and Maleki (2007) all conducted studies with control and treatment groups in which the language learners who received CS instruction used significantly more strategies than their counterparts on the posttest. The students in Rabab'ah's (2015) training group also demonstrated a significant increase in communicative competence on an oral test when compared with their untrained peers,

and the participants in Nakatani's (2005) study likewise demonstrated significant improvement on an oral post-test. Lam (2010) obtained similar results when testing students three times throughout a 12-week training intervention, but also recorded that only the low-proficiency students showed "consistent increases" (p. 13) over the treatment period. In line with the limiting factor noticed by Lam (2010), it should be added as a caveat that in these and in other studies reviewed in this essay that -- notwithstanding the increase in the use of some of the CSs taught -- others of the strategies included in the intervention were not used more frequently by participants post training. That is to say, even with the apparent success of CS instruction, certain limitations to the generalizability of strategy training should be taken into account and studied further.

Approaches to CS Instruction

When presented with reasoning and evidence, it is hard to argue against the inclusion of CS training as part of L2 curriculum and teaching. Researchers have proposed varied means of teaching CS awareness; the use of these techniques with L2 learners and three common components of proposed approaches will be briefly discussed here. Though some researchers believe CSs can be taught effectively through "indirect instruction" by simply "engaging learners in conversational interaction" (Richard, 1990, p. 76), this approach strikes me as 'nonteaching'. Consequently, all of the methods presented here fall under the explicit CS instruction umbrella.

A common teaching technique throughout the proposals on how to teach CSs is the use of explanations and examples of the target strategies, often including modeling by the teacher and collectively referred to as awareness or consciousness raising (Dörnyei,

1995; Rabab'ah, 2015). In some cases, explanations and examples are given in the form of a handout with detailed definitions, useful TL vocabulary and phrases, and patterns or tailored forms (Dörnyei, 1995; Nakatani, 2005). In other schemes, the information is presented orally or via video (Arteaga & Llorente, 2012; Lam, 2010). In either case, the goal is the same: to call the learners' attention to the variety and usefulness of CSs for L2 communication.

Among the suggested methods of instruction is the use and practice of the focus strategies in communicative activities. A variety of possible activities has been proposed depending on the CSs being targeted. In most cases the activity has an objective other than the use of the CSs, but usually also includes a "special focus on the CSs" (Rabab'ah, 2015). In most of the paradigms, students are allowed time to brainstorm and rehearse what strategies are appropriate and how to utilize them in the activity. The diversity of activity ideas presented by the researchers is a good reminder to instructors of the flexibility possible in teaching communication and the need to adapt the approach to the circumstances and the students.

Self-reflection and evaluation following the use of communicative strategies is a final commonality among the procedures proposed for teaching CSs (Lam, 2010). In some models, the reflection is done in groups and in others it is undertaken on an individual basis. Rabab'ah (2015) suggests video recording CS practice to evaluate strategy use afterward, while Nakatani (2005) advocates that the students keep a "strategy diary" (p. 80) in which to plan CS use before activities and reflect on their performance after completing tasks. Whatever the details of the respective plans, it is safe to say that

the step of self-evaluation is an important part of CS training because of its potential for developing metacognitive awareness in the learners.

While these three points are common components of CS teaching approaches, they should not be taken to fully represent all the complexities of the teaching strategies that each author proposes. They are, however, a useful starting point for planning direct CS instruction in the L2 classroom.

The Case of Circumlocution and ACTFL

One specific CS merits brief individual treatment due to its prominence in the research literature: circumlocution. Liskin-Gasparro (1996) describes circumlocution as "the use of [the L2] to describe an item that is missing from one's lexicon" (p. 320). Among the many CSs that researchers address, circumlocution has a singular place in the literature and is even regarded by some as the most important strategy for L2 learners to acquire, given that lexical breakdowns can lead so quickly to communication failure (Arteaga & Llorente, 2012; Dörnyei, 1995). The respective value of one CS versus another is up for debate, but what is certain is that circumlocution is the most commonly discussed and researched CS and one of only a handful mentioned explicitly in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2012). It is noteworthy that in all the experimental studies addressed in this essay in which some combination of CSs were explicitly taught, circumlocution was invariably included among the target strategies.

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2012) state that Advanced High speakers "demonstrate a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms or for limitations in vocabulary by the confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, and illustration" (p. 5) and similar skills are noted

for advanced mid and advanced low levels. While it may be true that this strategy is a prominent feature of *advanced* L2 speakers, I echo Berry-Bravo (1993) and Arteaga and Llorente (2012) in calling for circumlocution to be taught in beginning-level L2 classrooms. If students are to become advanced speakers who make "confident use of communicative strategies" (ACTFL, 2102, p. 5) in the TL, they must begin early on. Rich (2004) posits that "the development of strategic competence appears to be largely a matter of overcoming affective and sociocultural rather than cognitive or psycholinguistic difficulties," (p. 4). With that perspective in mind, helping students to utilize circumlocution early and often seems one of the best and quickest ways to overcome these affective worries and obstacles en route to increased strategic competence. I regularly have my students play a variety of word games in which the students take turns describing the vocabulary represented by pictures on cards (e.g., leisure activities, professions, etc.). I find it noteworthy that even beginning students with a limited vocabulary successfully can play this game after a brief demonstration and become very comfortable circumlocuting terms after just a few rounds of the game. Berry-Bravo (1993), Rich (2004), and Arteaga and Llorente (2012) offer a plethora of other simple, engaging ways of teaching this valuable skill to beginning students of Spanish that can no doubt be adopted to any other target language.

Conclusion

Communicative competence is the ultimate goal of L2 teachers for their students. To fully achieve that goal, learners must develop strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). While many fundamentals in second language acquisition must be assimilated implicitly by each student, CSs do not have to be one of them. As a language teacher, it is

my responsibility to creatively, carefully, and consciously teach my students strategies and techniques to overcome the problems they will unavoidably encounter on the path of L2 learning and communication. There is sufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate that explicit CS instruction can be effective and useful for L2 learners. To paraphrase the words of Rich (2004), "communication strategies are a vital part of a [teacher's] repertoire [and] it is only fair to pass them on to learners at all levels" (p. 4). Furthermore, I "do not have the luxury of allowing [these] skills to develop" (Arteaga & Llorente, 2012, p. 44) unaided, given the time and social restraints of L2 classroom teaching. In short, it is my responsibility to help my students become skilled users of some CSs that they will need to achieve well-rounded communicative competence.

CULTURE PAPER

Teaching the Pragmatics of Greetings in the L2 Classroom:

A Portal to New Cultural Perspectives

INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTION

While taking a course on teaching pragmatics to second language learners, I started to understand the importance of helping students gain a new cultural perspective and sensitivity in conjunction with learning a new language. As I learned about ways to teach pragmatics effectively, I realized the importance of including such lessons early on in beginning classes so that students' cultural awareness can grow steadily in conjunction with their language skills.

I wrote this paper exploring how language teachers can start developing learners' pragmatic knowledge from day one by teaching the cultural perspectives associated with greetings. Greetings are one of the very first things that language teachers teach to beginning language students, and these routines are very rich in culture. I argue that by including pragmatics as a part of teaching greetings, teachers will start opening students' eyes to the target language's cultural perspectives and will establish a basis of cultural understanding that will grow with each new speech act that students learn.

TEACHING THE PRAGMATICS OF GREETINGS IN THE L2 CLASSROOM:

A PORTAL TO NEW CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

The initial exchange that occurs when two or more individuals open a communicative interaction are an essential and critical portion of human beings' social interactions (Pillet-Shore, 2012). Any adult knows from experience the importance of first impressions and has felt the effects of both positive and negative initial exchanges with others. Greetings are considered a universal aspect of human social interaction (Ferguson, 1976; Zeff, 2016) and wherever they fall on the scale of intricacy, from a small physical gesture of acknowledgement to much more complex rituals and exchanges (Schleicher, 1997), they are "culturally saturated acts that can determine the course of an encounter well past the initial exchange" (Zeff, 2016, p. 3). What counts as an appropriate greeting varies greatly from culture to culture; proper usage requires at the very least a basic understanding of the cultural values in which the salutation takes place. Most people use greetings dozens of times a day, with each exchange affecting the relationships between individuals.

Given the significance and frequency of greetings in everyday interaction, together with the culturally dependent nature of the exchanges, it is easy to understand the necessity of teaching appropriate greeting forms in the second language (L2) classroom. However, merely teaching memorized routines of greetings and formulaic language without attention to cultural values and perspectives can "pose practical problems" (Jaworski, 1994, p. 41) for L2 learners when they use their second language. Such language learners find themselves using correct forms of the target language (TL),

but operating under their first language (L1) cultural norms and worldviews. This mismatch of linguistic forms and cultural perspectives can lead to misunderstanding and, if it is to be remedied, requires that the L2 speaker better understand the cultural context and politeness perspectives of the target language community. In other words, to accurately convey his or her intended meaning in the L2, the learner must have a command of much more than a few memorized phrases. This knowledge, "that influences and constrains speakers' choices regarding use of language in socially appropriate ways" (LoCastro, 2012, p. 307), is known as pragmatic competence. Therefore, in regard to teaching greetings in the L2 classroom, teachers' objectives should not only be to equip students with an array of useful greeting forms or culturally normative rituals, but also to strengthen the students' ability to greet other speakers of the TL in pragmatically appropriate ways. Furthermore, given that greetings are one of the first elements of a language to be taught in L2 classrooms, thoroughly addressing the pragmatics of greetings can serve as an effective gateway to and foundation for the students' development of pragmatic awareness in the target language.

The goal of this paper is to consider distinctive features of greetings in Spanish and English and the worldviews and politeness orientations that underpin them, and to outline how teaching the pragmatics of greetings is an ideal introduction for students to the target culture. I will begin by revisiting the concepts of politeness and face as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987) to form a theoretical backdrop to the subsequent analysis of research literature. Next, I will briefly discuss one distinctive element of greetings in English and in Spanish respectively, illustrating how they exemplify differing

worldviews. I will end with my conclusions about the potential benefits of teaching the

pragmatics of greetings in Spanish and English foreign/second language classrooms.

Face and Politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed a framework regarding politeness in

communication that has become one of the most widely cited in the research literature.

Their paradigm is based on the concept of face, "the public self-image that every member

wants to claim for himself" (p. 311). This construct is further divided into positive face

and negative face, and each type of face is respectively acknowledged by others through

politeness strategies. Pinto (2008) summarizes the concepts of face and face-saving

politeness strategies as follows:

> The concept of *negative face* involves the desire of every adult member to be
> unimpeded by others, and in turn, negative politeness involves non-imposition
> and is therefore *avoidance based*. Less obvious is *positive face*, the desire to be
> ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired. Consequently, positive
> politeness is *approach-based* since it is oriented toward the positive face and self-
> image of [the hearer], indicating that [the speaker] acknowledges [the hearer's
> wants] (p. 372).

With these distinctions established, it is possible to code the politeness strategies that

people use as either negative or positive oriented. In this paper, I echo Pinto (2008),

Brown and Levinson (1987), and others in arguing that cultures generally value one type

of face above the other and that the manifestation of the dominant face is observable in

the inclination of the cultures to rely more heavily on positive or negative politeness

strategies. Specifically, I analyze greetings in English and Spanish and attempt to show

the relative value placed on each type by the respective culture.

The Case of Greetings

Formulaic Greetings in English

For many English language learners (ELLs), English L1 greetings often appear to be insincere, impersonal, and meaningless exchanges (Jaworski, 1994; Schleicher, 1997). The following example illustrates why so many initially view English greetings in this way.

Speaker 1 (Enters the room, sees Speaker 2 working at a desk): *"Hi, how are you?"*

Speaker 2 (Looks up briefly): *"Fine thanks, and you?"*

Speaker 1: *"I'm fine"* (Both move on to other work)

This dialogue, far from a contrived example, is in fact a sequence I personally experience and observe several times daily, a sequence used countless times (in varying forms) every day by English speakers around the world. If this is a true representation of one form of English greetings, how can the argument that these exchanges are meaningless and impersonal be refuted? To quote DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) when writing about a similar communicative act, "The issue is not whether or not [English speakers] are insincere but the pragmatic function of [a greeting] in different cultures" (p. 251). A brief examination of the short greeting dialogue presented earlier (though obviously not indicative of all of the limitless scenarios in which greetings in English take place) helps to clarify the pragmatic function of greetings that DeCapua and Wintergerst mention. Furthermore, such an analysis is informative in broad terms in regard to politeness and face considerations in English.

One of the most problematic features of greetings in English for ELLs is the formulaic question "How are you?" The difficulty arises due in large part to the fact that the question is rarely used with the intention of discovering the wellbeing of the addressee, yet ELLs are often unaware of this and answer the question literally (Jaworski, 1994). As seen in the previous example, neither Speaker 2 nor Speaker 1 volunteered any substantial information about their physical or emotional state in response to the question and neither waited around after the initial exchange expecting to hear more. This use of questions like "How are you?" to "break the ice" or to "establish co-presence" (LoCastro, 2012, p. 8), rather than for eliciting information, is an example of phatic speech and is a notable component in many English greetings. Thus, asking how someone is doing in an English greeting acknowledges the other individual but often requires nothing more than a brief "fine," or a similarly short, prescribed answer from the interlocuter to whom it is directed. This then raises the question about what makes this greeting appropriate and polite, and what this and similar formulaic routines in English (e.g. **Q**: How's it going? **A**: Good/Fine; **Q**: What's up? **A**: Not much, etc.) (Zeff, 2016) reveal about the cultural perspectives of English speakers.

Multiple researchers have concluded that British and American cultures place more importance on negative face, which accounts for the use of these seemingly insincere inquiries as greetings (Hickey, 1991; Hickey, 2001; Maíz-Arévalo, 2012; Márquez-Reiter, 1997; Pinto, 2008). As members of negative face-oriented societies, English speakers habitually use negative politeness as a means of avoiding imposition on others and, in that context, using the phatic phrase "How are you?" takes on a new meaning. If the speaker were to expect a truthful, detailed report when uttering "how are

you?", the threat to the hearer's negative face would be substantial. Instead, the greeting

serves to "show good intentions (i.e., we *could* talk)" but solicits no real information of

substance and hence "avoids imposing" (Pinto, 2008, p. 383) on the time or privacy of

the individual. It should be noted that to provide no response would be damaging to the

positive face of the asker, and consequently both interlocutors acknowledge the question

with the formulaic "fine." Thus, both positive and negative face are accounted for, but a

clear preference to avoidance-based politeness strategies is observed. This societal

perspective, when understood, provides a greater understanding of the pragmatic function

of the greeting "How are you?". While such greetings can certainly lead into

conversations of greater depth and personal content, and though formulaic greetings exist

in positive face-dominant cultures, the focus in this analysis is on phatic greetings in

which little or no private information is exchanged beyond the initial formulaic exchange,

since this appears to be the most perplexing to ELLs (Jaworski, 1994; Schleicher, 1997;

Zeff, 2016). On the other hand, greeting routines in Spanish demonstrate a different set of

politeness strategies that stem from a distinct cultural perspective.

Passing Greeting in Spanish

Most students in the United States who study Spanish as a foreign language are

taught some basic phrases of greetings and farewells within days, if not minutes, of

beginning an introductory Spanish course. Take for example the greetings and farewells

presented on the first page of the first chapter of one university-level Spanish textbook,

Exploraciones:

Saludos formales	**Respuestas**
Buenos días	Buenos días
¿Cómo está (usted)?	Bien gracias. ¿Y usted?

Saludos informales **Respuestas**
¡Hola! ¡Hola!
¿Cómo estas (tú)? Bien, gracias. ¿Y tú?

Despedidas
Adiós
Chao
Hasta luego

(Blitt and Casas, p. 4)

These phrases seem simple enough to use and many North American students whose L1 is English accept and use these expressions as one-to-one equivalents of their English counterparts. However, if these same students were to travel to Costa Rica, for example, and employ the phrases operating under their own English cultural and pragmatic paradigm, they might be very surprised when an acquaintance passes them in the street and calls outs *adiós* in a situation where they would expect to hear *hola*. Worse yet, they might say something like *Hola ¿Cómo estás?* to a passing friend on the sidewalk but come across as rude when they fail to stop and extend the conversation. An explanation of the pragmatic expectations for these and other greeting situations to beginning Spanish L2 learners can serve both for practical politeness purposes in greetings and as an introduction to the importance of speech acts.

Passing greetings are a unique type of interchange that are neither conventional greetings nor true farewells, but rather "simultaneously contain […] elements of both speech acts" (Pinto, 2008, p. 371). Passing greetings occur when two acquaintances pass each other and exchange a salutation that is analogous to a normal greeting but fails to offer a floor for further interaction (Areiza Londoño & Garcia Valencia, 2002). Researchers have noted that L1 speakers of English in the United States and Great Britain

tend to use the same type of routines and phrases for passing greetings that they

employee for more standardized acknowledgements of others, such as the "How are

you?" exchange previously discussed, and even shorter utterances like *hi*, *hello*, *hey*, or

the person's name (Goffman, 1971; Blair, 1983). In contrast, observers of passing

greetings in Spain, Mexico, and Costa Rica have noticed that when greetings are truly

passing (i.e., neither party stops to extend the conversation), Spanish speakers tend to

employ phrases typically associated with farewells such as *hasta luego* or *adiós* (Pinto,

2008) In contrast to English, words and phrases associated with greetings are noticeably

missing. Pinto (2008) observed that words and phrases customarily used only as greetings

such as *hola* and *¿Cómo estás?* were employed only when "the interlocutors would stop

and initiate a conversation" (p. 379). This phenomenon, which Pinto (2008) terms

"passing farewells" (p. 378), is sufficiently divergent from English as to be a cause of

pragmatic infelicities for L2 learners of Spanish, but can, on the other hand, also serve as

a valuable source of information about politeness perspectives in Spanish-speaking

countries.

In contrast to the negative face orientation of North American and British

societies, many Spanish-speaking cultures have been identified as positive face-oriented

(Ballesteros Martin, 2001; Pinto, 2005). The politeness strategies in these cultures are

therefore positive face-oriented and approach-based (Márquez Reiter, 1997). In the case

of passing greetings in Spanish, Pinto (2008) posits that it is with this high value on

positive politeness as the backdrop that fluent users choose to use words that are

characteristically related to farewells. He explains that by using these phrases of farewell,

the interlocuter is both "affirming and consolidating the relationship" while also clearly

signaling through semantic choice (approach-based) that he or she does not have "the immediate goal of initiating interaction" (p. 383). This honesty, clarity, and directness seen in the passing farewell is associated with positive politeness, given that it protects both parties from appearing disingenuous (reinforcing the approval both seek as sincere persons), while still including a friendly acknowledgement of one another that bolsters the relationship between acquaintances (Hidalgo-Downing, Hidalgo-Downing, & Downing, 2014; Márquez Reiter, 1997).

As with English, it should be noted that this is just one example of how a specific aspect of Spanish greetings typifies the positive face dominance, and that other types and situations of greeting, as well as other speech acts, also demonstrate similar politeness strategies (Michno, 2016). It does however present a unique stumbling block for native English speakers, in that the choice of words and phrases used in in passing greetings is completely counterintuitive to the L1 and may thus require an explicit explanation as to the reasoning behind that choice.

Greeting Pragmatics as the Foundation for Later Speech Acts

As previously postulated, due to their primary status among speech routines taught in L2 classrooms, greetings are an ideal source of early pragmatic and cultural knowledge for L2 learners. In making this argument, I echo the proposal of Schleicher (1997) to use greetings to teach cultural understanding, but extend the proposition in that I suggest that teaching the politeness perspectives and pragmatics associated with greetings lays a foundation that prepares learners to later pay close attention to other speech acts in the TL. A few examples of the transferability of the perspectives and

practices of greeting to other speech routines in English and Spanish will help to substantiate this claim.

As illustrated, formulaic greetings in English serve "to support social relationships" and foster goodwill while simultaneously employing avoidance-based politeness strategies, in deference to the high value placed on negative face in North American culture (Goffman, 1971, p. 67). If, while teaching basic greeting formulas, English as a foreign/second language teachers take advantage of the opportunity to also explain about this high value placed on negative face and negative politeness strategies in North American and British society, the students will be better prepared to notice and understand other speech acts founded on the same cultural paradigm. For example, pseudo-invitations, another problematic feature of English for ELLs, will make much more sense if the students already know how phatic speech is used in greetings. These ostensible invitations occur when one interlocuter proposes doing an activity together with the other, for example saying "we should have dinner some time," but the rather vague suggestion is not really intended to result in an outing together (Eslami, 2005). Learners who understand the pragmatics of greetings will more readily be able to see how pseudo-invitations demonstrate "positive social interest without making a firm social commitment, which speakers may not wish to keep" (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004, p. 251), in much the same way as the questions "How are you? or "What's up?" acknowledge another's presence but avoid imposition on negative face.

Similarly, as has been articulated, greeting styles in Spanish exemplify the value placed on positive face, through demonstrations of sincerity, candor, and solidarity (Hidalgo-Downing, Hidalgo-Downing, & Downing, 2014; Michno, 2017; Pinto, 2008).

Teachers who use greetings as a chance to highlight the positive face-orientation and positive politeness in Spanish-speaking cultures will prepare their students for learning the pragmatics of other speech acts based in the same world views, such as requests. Students who learn from greetings that frankness and camaraderie are highly valued in positive face-oriented cultures will not view Spanish speakers as curt and rude but rather understand that "in Spanish everyday tasks are regarded as less imposing on the addressee and thus can be requested with more direct constructions" because they are more concerned about "approval and involvement" than non-imposition and detachment (Márquez Reiter, 1997, p.162). In short, teaching cultural perspectives associated with greetings prepares Spanish language students to understand how those viewpoints inform other speech acts in the target language.

Conclusion

In summary, if I am to successfully prepare students to be competent, proficient, real-world users of English and Spanish, it is imperative that I include pragmatics in the day-to-day lessons that I teach. Second language learners are tasked with learning not only an entirely new linguistic system, but also the cultural perspectives and practices that accompany that language, an undertaking that I have a duty to assist students with from the first day that they arrive in my class. Because greetings are invariably one of the first language skills that I teach my students, and because greetings are highly culturally dependent speech acts, they provide me with an early window into the target culture that I can help students to open. I can never prepare my students for every single situation in which they will find themselves needing to use the TL, but I can help them start to recognize the "available patterns and routines" (Zeff, 2016, p. 4) within the target culture

so that they will be able to make informed decisions in any given setting. By using greetings to teach the pragmatics of the TL from the beginning, I can help my students construct a new paradigm of politeness that will grow in step with their expanding L2 linguistic knowledge. Thus, greetings can serve not only as the means by which we build relationships with others, but indeed as the portal to new cultural perspectives.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PAPER

A True Beginner with an Insider's View:

Language Learning Insights from My Semester as a Novice-Level Student

INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTION

During one semester in the MSLT program, I had the chance to enroll in a beginning-level Chinese class to analyze and learn from my experience as a true beginner. I did this by journaling after each class and later by exploring salient themes from that journal. This paper is the result of that investigation and includes a combination of my own words as recorded in my journal and relevant literature that helps frame my experience.

The themes that I researched are insightful to me as a language teacher. They all deal with emotion and motivation and provided a valuable reminder to me of the often challenging and mercurial experience of being a beginning language student. From this experience, I believe that I have become a more empathetic language teacher, sensitive to students' frustrations, challenges, and needs and able to address them in positive and productive ways. This proved to be a valuable form of professional development and one that I recommend to all L2 teachers.

A TRUE BEGINNER WITH AN INSIDER'S VIEW:

LANGUAGE LEARNING INSIGHTS FROM MY SEMESTER AS A NOVICE-

LEVEL STUDENT

Background

I still remember the day I decided to begin studying Chinese. In an almost

epiphanic moment of clarity, a single, simple question came to my mind, "Why not just

do it?" Just like that, my mind was made up and a few months later I enrolled in a

beginning Mandarin Chinese class, determined to begin learning the language. To say

that I was a true beginner in regard to the Chinese language is accurate (I knew at best

five or six words of Chinese my brother had taught me); however, I was no stranger to

being a student in beginning language classes. I was, what I will call, a seasoned

beginner, having taken entry-level American Sign Language, Spanish, and Portuguese

classes in the past. Nevertheless, this was a new and unique experience in that I would no

longer be viewing the language class through student eyes alone, but with the "dual

perspective of [a teacher]-turned learner" (Bailey, 1983, p. 78). After two semesters of

studying second language teaching and learning, and with two semesters of experience

teaching Spanish classes, I was entering the Chinese classroom as a sort of insider,

prepared to view the experience with fresh eyes and equipped to notice and interpret

elements of the experience in new ways. Throughout the semester-long course, I kept a

journal of my observations, writing nearly every day, soon after class, in order to capture

an accurate picture of the events and emotions. At the end of the semester, I read my

journal and identified "significant trends […that arose] frequently or with great salience"

(Bailey, 1983, p. 72). This paper examines some of those themes and connects them with

the current research literature in second language (L2) teaching and acquisition, in an

effort to better understand and glean lessons from my semester turn as a novice language

learner.

<div align="center">**Themes and Lessons**</div>

I will approach each theme from my journal by describing what I experienced and

observed and connecting that with theories and studies from the literature that help me

interpret my experiences. Then, because this exercise is largely intended to make me a

more conscientious and better L2 teacher, I will explore pedagogical implications from

each topic discussed.

Theme #1

The drive to do MORE. Perhaps the single most salient theme in my journal was

my expressed need to do *more*: prepare more, practice more, get in more repetitions, etc.

This drive can be seen as early as day two and runs throughout the whole journal:

> "I also want to go online and listen to LOTS more repetitions of the sounds […]
> Then I need to practice, practice, practice!!!!" (Day 2); "What I really, really need
> is more practice of the pronunciation of the Pinyin syllables..." (Day 3); "I really,
> really need to get well prepared before class…" (Day 10); "I need to spend more
> time writing and reviewing characters outside of class." (Day 16); "I feel that I
> need to find ways to USE the […] elements of those first lessons" (Day 20); etc.

Throughout the semester I maintained a high grade in the class, yet I felt a consistent drive

do more, a feeling that there was always additional work that I needed and wanted to get

done.

L2 motivational self-system. The importance of motivation in L2 learning is

nearly universally accepted and, as noted, some desire or impulse was pushing me

throughout the semester to do more as a language learner (Lamb, 2017). The "currently

dominant theoretical framework" (Lamb, 2017, p. 316) for analyzing motivation in L2

learning is the "L2 motivational self-system" theory which (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 9), and this

theory offers an idea as to the source of my constant drive to do more to improve my

Chinese. Teimouri (2017) succinctly summarizes three basic components of Dörnyei's

system:

> The L2 motivational self system […] consists of three constructs assumed to
> motivate language learners: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning
> experience. The ideal L2 self is the representation of learners' personal desires,
> aspirations, and ideals concerning language learning. The ought-to L2 self, by
> contrast, characterizes the image L2 learners believe their significant others (e.g.,
> family members, friends, teachers) expect them to realize. This less-internalized
> future self-guide is the representation of L2 learners' duties, responsibilities, and
> obligations. The third component, language learning experience, reflects the
> learner's attitudes toward learning the target language and is amenable to the
> immediate learning context and environment (e.g., L2 course, L2 teacher, learning
> materials). (p. 683)

According to Teimouri (2017), learners "perceive a distance between their actual self and

their desired future self, they feel discomfort", which in turn "triggers the incentive and

direction to reduce the distance and match the current self with the desired self" (p. 687).

Additionally, those whose primary motivation is ideal L2 self are promotional-self

regulated, focusing on "advancement, growth, and development" "represent[ing] L2

goals as hopes, aspirations, or ideals" and are concerned with "gains and nongains" while

those predominately motivated by the ought-to L2 self are guided by preventional self-

regulation that represents "L2 goals as duties, obligations, or oughts" and is concerned

with "losses and nonlosses" (Teimouri, 2017, p. 687). Given that ideal L2 self has been

shown to be "associated with motivated learning behavior" (Papi & Teimouri, 2014, p.

493), "actual or intended learning effort" (Lamb, 2017, p. 317), and is focused on

advancement and gains, it would be safe to hypothesize that my future ideal L2 self could

be at least one of the sources of my driving motivation.

Ideal L2 self. Examined more closely, my ideal L2 self appears more and more to

be at the root of my endless need to do more as a language learner. Dörnyei (2009)

identifies several conditions that "enhance or hinder the motivational impact" of future

selves, including among the top six, "(1) availability of an elaborate and vivid self-

image," "(2) perceived plausibility," "(4) necessary activation / priming," and "(5)

accompanying procedural strategies" (p. 18). The day I decided to learn Chinese, in my

mind it became at once a matter of *how* and *when* I would become a fluent speaker, rather

than *if*. Whether due to my previous successes as a language learner, some personality

trait, the Chinese fluency of friends and family, or some combination of them all, I do not

know, but I considered it at once not only possible but inevitable when I had committed

myself. This image of myself as a fluent Mandarin speaker and the attainability of that

future-self remained throughout the semester and beyond, accounting for conditions 1, 2,

and 4. Owing to my experience as a successful language learner and my growing

knowledge of L2 acquisition, the procedural strategies necessary to align my actual L2

self and my ideal L2 self were known to me and reflected in my drive to "practice,

practice, practice" (Day 2), "to get ready and be able to participate in the class" (Day 33),

to "find ways to make the vocab and grammar […] come to life in full thoughts,

sentences, and communication" (Day 41), etc. My particular circumstances and mentality

provided the fertile soil necessary for the ideal L2 self to thrive and equipped me with an

unremitting impetus toward motivated learning behaviors throughout the semester.

Pedagogical implications. Knowing that "L2 learners with strong ideal L2 selves have vivid visions of their desired language related goals and are eagerly driven to approach them" (Teimouri, 2017, p. 700), it stands to reason that L2 instructors should do all they can to build and develop a robust ideal L2 self in each of their students. In their book *Motivating learners, motivating teachers: Building vision in the language classroom*, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) propose a six-step process through which teachers can do just that. Bier (2015) summarizes the steps:

Step 1: Creating the language learner vision

Step 2: Strengthening the vision through imagery enhancement

Step 3: Substantiating the learner's vision by making it plausible

Step 4: Transforming the vision into action

Step 5: Keeping the vison alive

Step 6: Counterbalancing the vision by considering failure (p. 177-178).

Each step is accompanied by three to five concrete strategies that teachers can use to achieve the desired outcome at each level, approaches such as describing an ideal future L2 self based on one's own strengths and values, group brainstorming sessions, and helping students develop an action plan with sub-goals. While a list of all of the strategies is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that "some empirical studies already offer evidence that these strategies can work" (Lamb, 2017, p. 317). As an L2 teacher, I find it encouraging to have a repertoire of specific, proven techniques to draw on to help students expand their vision of the L2 user they can become.

Theme #2

The emotional waves. To describe *only* the powerful drive to work hard that

propelled me during my Chinese learning experience would be to tell only half of the

story and paint an incomplete and inaccurate picture of my affective state throughout the

semester. If that compelling motivation was the sustaining force, the proverbial

lighthouse in the distance, beckoning to me throughout the course, the day-to-day

emotions of language learning were the unpredictable, surging waves, one minute

propelling me to a peak of near euphoric success (e.g., Day 26), the next sending me

crashing into a trough of frustration, anxiety, and discouragement (e.g., Day 32). I knew

what was coming; I had ridden those waves before; but joy and worry are still just as real

and intense, no matter how many times one has felt them before. However, I *was* better

prepared to handle these emotional swings than in past language learning episodes,

specifically in being able to recognize frustration and worry for what they are: natural yet

ephemeral obstacles in the process of L2 learning.

Negative emotions. Language learning is a process with "lots of temporary ups

and downs" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 25) and the research "literature overwhelmingly has

concentrated on negative emotion" (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, p. 240). Researchers

have analyzed anxiety, shame, frustration, and perceived lack of competence, among

other negative feelings, and the effects of these on L2 learners and L2 acquisition

(Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016; MacIntyre & Serroul, 2015; Teimouri, 2017). Dewaele

and MacIntyre (2014), note that list of potential sources of negative emotions in L2

learning is lengthy (e.g., harsh error correction, incompatibility with teacher, self-

presentation concerns, lack of perceived progress), and that the language learning process

is particularly prone to producing negative emotions. In differentiating (though not

entirely separating) these emotions from broader themes of motivation or personal temperament, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) explain that emotions are "short-lived reactions to personally significant events" (p. 197), characterized by feelings, physical response, goal-directedness, and social expression. The emotion of language anxiety, for example, produces feelings of worry, tension, dread, etc., physical phenomena such as increased heart rate and body sweats, an instinct to leave a social situation one doesn't fit in, and social expression in the form of a blank face that elicits help. These descriptions aptly capture the emotional lows that I recorded in my journal.

As any L2 learner will know firsthand, these negative emotions can have adverse effects, leading to, among others, actions such as "closing off, withdrawal, and self-protection behavior" (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, p. 198), which may ultimately affect L2 achievement. Conversely, some researchers have found cases when anxiety can actually have "some beneficial outcomes," "function[ing] as facilitative for some specific learners" (Teimouri, 2017, p. 688-89). Papi and Teimouri (2014) used the L2 motivational self-system discussed earlier to explain how anxiety can enable some learners and yet seriously impede others. They hypothesize that learners who are predominately motivated by the ideal L2 self would find anxiety inhibiting because it clashes with their promotion orientation so focused on advancement, progress, and the presence of positive outcomes. On the other hand, they reason that L2 learners who are focused on the ought-to self will be stimulated by the anxiety because it fits their prevention orientation so focused on avoiding negative outcomes and losses. In either case, it is important for teachers to recognize the prevalence and prominence of anxiety

and other negative emotions in the L2 learning process and consider how to address them.

Positive emotions. On the flipside of the emotional lows that L2 learners experience are moments of general gratification and, at times, even intense joy. A relatively new branch of scholarship in second language acquisition (SLA) explores the positive emotions present in L2 learning, their effects, and how to promote them (e.g., Arnold, 2011; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Much of the field of study draws on the theories of Barbara Fredrickson, a leading scholar in positive psychology. One such emotion that has been analyzed is that of language enjoyment, which Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) examine in a large-scale study of L2 learners from across the world. They describe enjoyment as "a state in which psychological needs are met" and maintain that "the process of language learning will implicate the two key sources of enjoyment: developing interpersonal relationships and making progress toward a goal" (p. 242). They found that the learners in their study experienced "significantly more enjoyment than anxiety" (p. 248) in their L2 classes and determined that anxiety and enjoyment are often coexistent, rather than extremes of the same spectrum. Excitement, interest, and a love of learning have also been mentioned as positive emotions to consider in regard to language learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

One specific trend that I noticed throughout my journal, which fits neatly within this construct of positive emotions and enjoyment, was the immense joy that I felt from little successes in actually using the target language. For example, on Day 26 I expressed that "it was SOOO exciting and gratifying" and that I was "SO thrilled" because I had

used some new vocabulary and grammar structures to speak very briefly with a native

Chinese speaker and she had understood me. Similarly, on another occasion I recorded

that, "today went SO well and I feel so excited about how things are going," and

continued by explaining that I had successfully "answered not one, but TWO questions

that the teacher asked me in Chinese," and that despite the fact that "the answers were

slow and probably horribly pronounced, […] that didn't make me feel any less proud and

encouraged" (Day 11). These comments illustrate Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014)

description of circumstances that trigger enjoyment in language learning, situations

"where challenges and skills to meet them are aligned" (p. 242), and echo the

observations of some of the participants in their study who also noted that "authentic use

of the [L2] can boost [enjoyment]" (p. 260) and produce great satisfaction. Arnold (2011)

similarly observes that "experiencing real achievement in using the target language in

meaningful communication is the surest route to self-esteem" (p. 17), a construct that has

"been associated with L2 motivation and achievement" (Lamb, 2017, p. 320). Temouri

(2017) likewise states that "a match between L2 learners' present self and their desired

self would induce a sense of elation, such as joy" (p. 686), describing precisely what

occurred when I used the language, a momentary realization of my ideal L2 self, a fluent

speaker of Chinese. Another notable finding by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) that could

account for the elation I felt so regularly as a Chinese student, was the discovery that

"those who knew more languages, had reached a higher level in the FL, felt that they

were above average in their group of peers, were more advanced in their education and

were older" (p. 249) reported significantly more enjoyment and significantly less anxiety,

all demographic descriptors that would apply to me when compared with the average of

my classmates. Their results also parallel my own: I believe I was better prepared to handle the negative emotions during this language learning venture as compared with my past experiences.

Perhaps the most exciting and compelling portion of the research literature is that which underscores the benefits from these positive emotions. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), drawing on Fredrickson's (2001) research and frameworks, enumerate five ways in which positive emotions benefit learners:

> First, positive emotions tend to broaden people's attention and thinking, leading to exploration and play, new experiences and new learning. Second, positive emotion helps to undo the lingering effects of negative emotional arousal. [Third,] positive emotion [promotes] resilience by triggering productive reactions to stressful events, such as […] making salient feelings of happiness and interest while under stress. Fourth, positive emotion promotes building personal resources, such as social bonds built by smiles, intellectual resources honed during creative play […]. Fifth, positive emotions can be part of an upward spiral toward greater well being in the future… (p. 197-198)

The fifth point is particularly interesting, and the authors note that the upward spiral is possible because even long after the positive emotions pass, the resources gained endure. While acknowledging that these emotional benefits are of course not exclusive to L2 students, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) go on to explain how the five elements specifically facilitate language learners in building and reaching future L2 selves. For example, the salience of interest and happiness, even when under stress helps students stay engaged with the language. Also, the broadening of attention helps students notice more elements of the TL, which may be crucial for acquisition. Additionally, "the formation of possible future L2 selves would be facilitated by the positive-broadening power of anticipatory emotion" (p. 199). In these ways and other, the broadening, resource-creating power of positive emotions stimulates learners' progression.

Pedagogical implications. The pedagogical implications then seem rather straightforward: reduce negative emotions as much as possible and promote the positive ones. However, it is important to remember the conclusion from Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) study that anxiety and enjoyment are related, yet independent emotions that often coexist and even "cooperate from time to time" (p. 262), as well as Teimouri's (2017) assertion that anxiety can be beneficial in some ways. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) suggest that though the balance is ideally "tipped in favour of enjoyment," what one must achieve is a "constructive balance between enjoyment and anxiety" (p. 262). To their point, Temouri (2017) recommends that teachers "create a balanced motivational practice by taking advantage of both promotion and prevention motivational strategies to maximize students' motivational effectiveness" (p. 703) (e.g., highlighting gains made and positive outcomes but also reminding students of the potential adverse effects of their actions or nonactions). Additionally, one of the most straightforward but efficient ways that a teacher can help students combat the negative effects of discouragement and frustration is by simply informing them that such feelings are common among all L2 learners and that they should not consider it a personal shortcoming when they experience them.

Arnold (2011) encourages language teachers to promote positive affect in the classroom by focusing on helping students build L2 self-esteem ("work with the *inside*" p. 16) and creating a positive class environment (work on "the *between*" p. 17). She urges teachers to "transmit feelings of confidence in students; give constructive feedback and praise; pay attention to and listen to students; smile, make eye-contact; show interest in answering students' questions; take personal interest in students; [and] check for

understanding" (p. 18), to achieve positive affect on the inside and between students.

MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) likewise affirm that emotional reactions are "semi-controllable" (p. 200) and, borrowing ideas from positive psychology, describe a method of "systemic desensitization" (p. 205) through which students use imagination to dull their emotional reactions to specific L2 learning situations that cause anxiety. These authors also list teaching practices that promote positive-broadening emotions individually and as a classroom community by increasing "teacher immediacy" (e.g., by "reducing physical distance, displaying relaxed postures and movements, using gestures, smiling, using vocal variety, […] engaging in eye contact during interactions, using personal examples, asking questions, using humor, addressing others by name, praising others, initiating discussion and using inclusive pronouns), as well as by "creat[ing] flourishing groups by using language that is overtly supportive, encouraging and appreciative, and avoids negativity, disapproval, sarcasm and cynicism [, and by] asking questions using "inquiry" language that is aimed at exploring or examining a position" (p. 210). These recommendations are strikingly similar to those given by Arnold (2011), further underscoring their important role in fostering positive emotions in the L2 classroom.

As previously mentioned, the most prominent origin of positive emotion for me throughout the semester was the successful use of Chinese. I do not know exactly why I garnered such notable pleasure from those small triumphs, but I believe it has to do with past L2 learning experiences teaching me to not take those modest steps for granted, and because I knew to recognize them as such. That is a lesson I believe L2 teachers would do well to incorporate into their teaching, by creating and helping students reach small

goals regularly, daily if possible. Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) put it well: "Savouring small successes is good advice for the long-term health of both teachers and learners" (p. 266). Fortunately, at least two contemporary language teaching methodologies are readily conducive to helping students to see and enjoy regular growth in their L2: Tasked-based learning, Communicative Language Teaching.

Theme #3

    Working with others. A final theme of salience throughout my journal relates to group/partner work and my response to such arrangements. On several occasions, I mentioned disquiet about the situations, stating for example that "we did an activity in groups of four and it was very discouraging" (Day 33). In other instances, I expressed that "The group work and the practice have me excited and more confident" (Day 8), and that "We did an interview with a partner and it was fantastic" (Day 42). What was most noteworthy to me from these journal entries were the causes I expressed for my angst vs comfort. The issue seemed to be with how comfortable I felt with the individual(s). When I felt comfortable with the partner or group member I would "work through the questions and answers together and negotiate the meaning of things we didn't understand" (Day 42), but when I uncomfortable I "felt lots of inhibition about speaking" (Day 22). The origin of my discomfort seemed to be twofold: partners who I perceived to have a significantly higher level of Chinese fluency than me, and classmates I was unfamiliar with, a possibility I was eager to compare with L2 research findings.

    Willingness to communicate (WTC). Cao (2006) explains that once conceptualized as a stabile characteristic of individuals, WTC has been redefined "as a situational variable, open to changing across situations" (p. 1). Though the new paradigm

of WTC still accounts for personality as a factor in the willingness, it is a layered and more complex concept, now defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998, p. 547). MacIntyre (2007) clarifies that when talking about this decision at a given instant to speak or not, "the interplay of the features of the situation with the psychology of the individual speaker takes on a primary role in this paradigm" (p. 573). With that statement in mind, key features of situational WTC will be addressed here.

In line with my own observations during my Chinese class, Cao and Philip (2006) reveal that the participants in their study also identified "familiarity with interlocutor(s) […] as affecting WTC" (p. 487), a trend they found to be consistent with previous studies. More explicitly, they found "greater WTC in groups among friends than with unfamiliar classmates" (p. 488). Speaking of the social context relative to WTC, MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels (1998) list "level of intimacy," and "the L2 proficiency level of the interlocutor relative to the speaker" (p. 553), as variables that affect the situation, confirming again the importance of familiarity between interlocutors and verifying that my own inhibitions about working with partners with a higher L2 proficiency are comparable to the experiences of others. Also validating my own beliefs is the finding by Cao (2006) that, "familiarity with interlocutor may not be a static variable but a dynamic one" (p. 11), and that over the course of a semester or class, students can develop familiarity and increased WTC with each other through regular interaction. This corroboration of my own observations gives me reason to suspect that many of my students go through similar experiences, and thus motivates me to apply the lesson I learned to my teaching practice.

Pedagogical implications. Given the dependence of modern L2 methodologies on learners producing the language in authentic communication to facilitate acquisition, "a fundamental goal of L2 education should be the encouragement of WTC in language learning" (Cao, 2006, p. 1). From what is known about the influence of interlocutor familiarity and levels of L2 competence in pair and group work, teachers should be conscious of how they assign partners in the language classroom, in order to promote WTC. Specifically, I believe that students should be allowed to pick their partners a large percentage of the time (encouraging WTC) but that the instructor should assign partners on a regular basis as well to develop familiarity and community among classmates. I believe that this practice also helps students to face their fears degree by degree by learning to communicate in uncomfortable situations, a practice that will serve them well as they begin using the language outside of the classroom. With this balance of partners, some chosen and some assigned, students will have the emotional respite of working with friends and acquaintances much of the time, but will have to push themselves for short periods in a conscious effort to overcome their inhibitions with regards to interlocutors.

Conclusion

The opportunity to study Chinese as a true beginner was a valuable opportunity for professional growth for me, as I got to experience the reality that my own students live each day in my class, particularly on an affective level. As I analyzed the major themes from my language learning journal, I realized that they all deal quite directly with the emotional and motivational side of L2 learning, elements which, unless someone has experienced them recently, fade quickly from memory. That is to say, we know on some level that emotions and motivation are important, even critical, elements of our students'

experience, yet the raw, real edge of feeling is quickly dulled by time and we may lose

the ability to empathize quite as well with those we teach. For this reason, I believe being

a lifelong student of languages is perhaps the best professional development I can invest

in, a course of action I intend to follow as long as I am a language teacher.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

MOTIVATION

I first became interested in motivation in second language acquisition (SLA) during a pro-seminar at the beginning of the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program at USU. During the seminar, our instructor, Dr. deJonge-Kannan, mentioned almost in passing that motivation was one of the best predictors of success for students learning an L2. I was curious, since the claim fit with my own beliefs about language learning, but I didn't think much more about it until I stumbled on the same assertion while reading *The Teacher's Handbook* in which motivation is identified as "the most influential factor in successfully learning a new language" (Shrum & Glisan, 2016, p. 32). I decided I needed to know more about this crucial element of SLA and began to search for additional sources on the matter.

To begin my exploration of the topic, I reviewed the sources cited in *The Teachers' Handbook* and found one that was cited extensively in their section on motivation. The study was done by **Hernández (2006)** and assessed the relationship between student motivation and student achievement on a Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI). Hernández focused on three components of student motivation to learn a second language (L2): integrative, instrumental, and course requirements. Instrumental motivation is an L2 student's desire to learn the language for practical uses, such as for a career, while integrative motivation refers to one's desire to interact with fluent speakers of the target language. After surveying participating students about their motivations for learning an L2, the researchers administered a SOPI, then compared the relationship between the SOPI scores and the self-reported motivations. They concluded that integrative motivation was "a significant predictor of the SOPI scores," (p. 611) in other

words, a clear factor in students' acquisition. This study offered me several insights. To begin, this was the first time I found an empirical study with statistics that backed the claim of motivation as a crucial factor in SLA. Secondly, after reading the study I had a better picture of some of the components of motivation in L2 learners, namely the integrative and instrumental factors. Lastly, the author offered a list of proposed implications of the study on classroom activities, including suggestions to provide students with "opportunities...to interact within a language community, such as interviews with native…speakers" and encouragement to integrate more authentic materials from the L2, both of which allow students the opportunity to interact with the "real language" and potentially increase their integrative motivation (p. 611).

Wanting to build my understanding, I turned my attention to motivation in SLA. In a survey of research literature on motivation, **Dörnyei (1998)** sheds light on exactly what *is* SLA motivation, and assesses several "conceptualizations" offered by different researchers. From Dörnyei, I gleaned three principles that are particularly interesting and important to me as an L2 teacher. First, motivation is a dynamic force that changes over time due to its basis in an "individual's thoughts and beliefs" (p. 118). In other words, motivation is a "process whereby a certain amount of instigation force arises," but it is subject to "other forces com[ing] into play to weaken it" or conversely, to strengthen it (p. 118). This is welcome news as it indicates that the motivational level of my students, or even my own motivation, always has potential to increase.

A second principle of note in Dörnyei's article was the notion of *expectancy of success*, or the students' belief that their efforts can lead to success in the task they have undertaken (p. 119). When L2 learners believe that their efforts will be reflected in

learning outcomes, they are more likely to put forth diligent and sustained effort.

Conversely, if they believe that the task is impossible regardless of how hard they try,

they are highly unlikely to work diligently toward the objective. The implication for me

as a language instructor is that, to the extent possible, I need to help students see results,

no matter how small, and progress from their efforts, to make clear to them that the

outcomes that they achieve are directly correlated to their own diligence.

Lastly, Dörnyei presents his own framework of motivation components, divided

into *Language Level*, *Learner Level*, and *Learning Situation Level* (p. 125). Within each

level, he describes specific factors that affect motivation for L2 learners. For example,

under the *Learning Situation Level* he highlights a subcategory of *Teacher-Specific*

Motivational Components, including such traits as authority type, use of modeling, and

feedback (p. 125). Here, I noticed the important shift from previous studies that were

reviewed in the article, a shift from "*whether* [emphasis added] motivation has been

aroused" to a focus on "the *source* [emphasis added] of motivation [which] is very

important in a practical sense to teachers who want to stimulate students' motivation" (p.

125). For me, this focus offers clear pedagogical implications, which made me curious as

to how and how much a teacher can affect student motivation in the L2 classroom.

To answer my question, I first approached the negative side of the equation and

asked myself, "How does poor teaching affect student motivation?" In her meta-analysis

article on roles of teachers and learners in SLA de-motivation, **Yan (2009)** defines de-

motivation in SLA as the negative force that "restrains the present motives" that an L2

learner has to learn an L2 (p. 109). Importantly, students who are *now* de-motivated,

initially had a "motivational basis of…behavior" that propelled them to initiate the

learning process, but that basis has been overridden by other forces. Citing several research studies on the matter, Yan points out that among the many forces that students report as causes of de-motivation, almost always the top causes are teacher-related issues such as teachers' lack of commitment to or passion for teaching the language, teachers' failure to account for students' individual needs, mind-numbing teaching styles, teacher disorganization, etc. Clearly, many students are susceptible to de-motivation if their teachers fail to engage in motivation-maintaining strategies and motivational teaching styles. Again, I was struck by the influence teachers can potentially have on L2 learners' motivation to learn, and especially sobered by the weight of knowing that my influence can be detrimental to my students' enthusiasm if I perform poorly in my teaching. Though I do not bear the burden of providing my students with the motivation necessary to initiate the L2 learning process, I *am* entrusted with the motivation they bring to the table once they become my students and am charged with the maintenance and protection of that often delicate flame of desire to learn.

Rather than dwelling on thoughts of failure or focus on what *not* to do, I began looking for antidotes to de-motivational teaching and for good pedagogical practices to enhance my students' desire to learn. **Dörnyei and Csizér (1998)** assert that "skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness" in L2 classrooms, and so they synthesize nearly 100 techniques and recommendations for teachers to motivate students into "a smaller set of strategies that teachers should pay special attention to when trying to implement a motivationally conscious teaching approach" (p. 208). Their *Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners* were compiled through a study on 200 teachers of English in Hungary who rated strategies for

motivating their students on a scale of importance. Through a series of calculations Dörnyei and Csizér isolated the strategies that were deemed most important by the teachers and formed their 10 motivational macrostrategies for teachers. Without delving into all of the 10 suggestions, suffice it to say that the strategies are achievable, realistic goals that I can work toward as a teacher to foster greater motivation in the students that I teach. For example, the first commandment is to "set a personal example with your own behavior" (p. 215), which means having a positive and passionate attitude toward language learning, which will hopefully inspire students to follow suit. This, and the subsequent nine recommendations offer specific and realistic guidelines that I can focus on and incorporate into my teaching methods. Of course, students still must bring their own motivation to the language learning table, but through implementation of these techniques, I can maintain and even augment their impetus to learn the target language.

Despite my excitement upon finding results from an empirical study about possible motivational techniques that I could use as an L2 teacher, and despite the compatibility of those techniques with many of my own beliefs about good language teaching, I had some reservations about the study since the only basis for the recommendations was the opinion of foreign language teachers. I looked for more evidence from the students' point of view regarding the effectiveness of the strategies at maintaining or increasing student motivation, which I found in **Moskovsky, Albrabai, Paolini, and Ratcheva (2012)**. The authors carried out an experiment with two large groups of language students to determine "the actual motivational effect that teachers' classroom behaviors can have on learners" (p. 37). Before their course began, all participating students took a survey about their motivation for learning English (the L2 in

question). Then, from the beginning of the course, the teachers in the control group were left to teach as they always had. However, with the experimental group, the investigators trained the teachers in motivational strategies (based largely on Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) framework) and attended the classes to ensure that the strategies were implemented. At the end of the course all students from both groups took the motivation survey again. The results were clear; the level of motivation was higher among those students who had been taught by teachers using the motivational techniques than among the students in the control group. Moskovsky et al. conclude that the techniques espoused by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) are positively correlated with motivation among students whose teachers implement those practices.

After finding evidence to validate the use of the aforementioned motivational tactics, I decided to analyze one of the strategies more closely: "Promote learner autonomy" (Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998, p. 215). I found an article by **Little (2007)**, who defines learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 14) but hastens to add that it is "a matter of learners doing things not necessarily on their own but for themselves" (p. 14). That is to say, teachers and other interlocutors are still essential to the SLA process, but learners must embrace responsibility for their own learning since languages cannot be acquired by a dispassionate and disconnected learner. Little proposes that "it is in our nature [as humans] to be autonomous" (p. 17), that even babies have their own resolve to do things their way, so that to promote autonomy in learning is to channel the natural instinct each human has to act of their own volition. Furthermore, I learned from this article that, much like the *expectancy of success* mentioned earlier, autonomous learners who experience success will "be fulfilled and thus motivated

learners" (p. 18), while their "autonomy will be undermined if they do not feel that their learning effort is paying off" (p. 18). In other words, as I work to promote student autonomy, I must ensure that they experience success so that their feeling of self-fulfillment will in turn empower them to continue as autonomous learners. I envision this in practice as students helping to make decisions about what they want to learn and how to go about it, then feeling the satisfaction as their own decisions and efforts lead to successful language acquisition. For this reason, students need to have at least some freedom during activities to choose how they will carry them out, rather than always having strict instructions that eliminate any autonomy. In this type of classroom environment, I am always present to help and support the students, but instead of dominating all decision making and classroom activity, I act as *a* resource rather than *the* source. Student are thus self-directed, free to seek help or proceed on their own. As Little points out, autonomy is not about *not* having interaction with or reliance on other human beings, but rather the liberty to choose *how* and *when* we interact and depend on them.

The final portion of Little's essay taught me much about practical means of promoting student autonomy in the L2 classroom. He proposes three principles upon which "success in second and foreign language teaching is governed" (p. 23): learner involvement, learner reflection, and target language use. Achieving learner involvement requires me to draw students into the agenda setting, activity choosing, outcome evaluating, etc., decisions in the class. With time, I can help students develop the skills of self-management through which they will become more and more autonomous in their learning. Learner reflection is achieved when I carry on a dialogue with students about the communicative goals of the class and as we evaluate together whether we have or

have not reached those goals. While similar to the planning involved in the previous step, Little clarifies that L2 learners must reflect and assess their progress in their acquisition process with their teacher or peers so that eventually they will learn to do so on their own. For example, ACTFL proposes the use of "Can-Do Statements", a series of declarations which students use to evaluate their own abilities to carry out certain linguistic task (2015). After reading the statement (e.g., "I can greet others formally and informally"), the learners decide whether they can or cannot accomplish the task, or perhaps notes that they can do so partially or with help. This outward/social process of self-evaluation will "gradually transform into the capacity for inner speech…in the target language" (p. 25). Lastly, as the instructor in my classroom, I must set the precedent for use of the target language as the "medium through which all classroom activities are conducted, organisational and reflective as well as communicative" (p. 25). Students' autonomous decision to use the target language is key to language proficiency outcomes. Implementation of these principles will directly affect student motivation since, by definition, an autonomous, proactive learner *is* a motivated learner. As I then help students become truly autonomous, they will become both willing and able to maintain motivation and progress on their language learning journey independently.

I analyze in this annotated bibliography the role of motivation in SLA, specifically what role teachers play in maintaining and increasing motivation in their students. I have learned that because motivation is a dynamic process rather than a static character trait or goal, language teachers have the ability to increase their students' motivation. Research studies have shown me that teachers' strategies can help motivate their students. I can now use these strategies in my own classroom and will work to build

my students' self-confidence as language learners. I can tell them without hesitation that the most important factor in acquiring the language will be their own sustained effort that sprouts from their motivation. Finally, I have learned much about student autonomy in SLA and how to slowly acclimate and train my students to take on the role of responsible language learners. As I consciously apply these principles of motivation in my L2 classroom, and am a constant example of a motivated learner and teacher myself, I can empower my students to become autonomous language learners for life.

NATIVE SPEAKER VERSUS NON-NATIVE SPEAKER TEACHERS

As an L2 speaker and teacher of Spanish, I am keenly aware at times of my status (in the eyes of some) as a so-called non-native speaker (NNS) [1] of the language that I teach. Though I have never personally felt discriminated against or belittled in a direct manner due to this ascribed identity, I have at times felt uncomfortable with the label and have heard of others who have experienced prejudice as a result of teaching their own L2 as a foreign or second language. Additionally, I have had conversations on numerous occasions with colleagues and friends for whom English is their L2 and have repeatedly hypothesized that they are just as well prepared to teach English as I, given their high level of English proficiency and familiarity with the process of English learning. With this heightened interest in the NS teacher vs NNS teacher construct, and with a desire to know how my perceived status as a NS or NNS teacher (depending on whether I teach Spanish or English) could potentially affect the students I teach, I set about to review some of the research literature on the topic.

I began by reading an older study conducted by **Árva and Medgyes (2000)** that examined the teaching behavior of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Hungary and compared groups of NS and NNS colleagues. The objective of the authors was to assess how the two groups of teachers differed in their teaching styles and to gauge to what extent "participants' stated behaviour and actual behaviour differ[ed]" (p. 358). Participating teachers were observed and recorded as they taught and at a later time

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[1] While recognizing that the terms and notions "native" and "nonnative" speakers are largely rejected in contemporary SLA as divisive and imprecise, and despite my personal rejection of the dichotomy they create, I choose to employ them in this essay because of their prevalence in the articles I review.

were interviewed as to their own perceptions of NS vs NNS teaching practices in general and their own styles specifically. I found this study very informative since it addressed teachers' perspectives, practices, and a contrast of the two. According to data gathered from the surveys, NNS of English perceived themselves as deficient and disadvantaged in their English competency when compared with their NS counterparts but felt better prepared to teach grammar due to their well-developed metacognitive awareness honed by years as English language learners themselves. Conversely, the native speakers confirmed that they felt ill equipped to teach grammar due to their naturalistic experience learning English and expressed their belief that their colleagues who could use the local language had an advantage when teaching beginning students especially. Additionally, the NS teachers described themselves as more laidback and less structured in their teaching approach while viewing the NNS instructors as more rigid and detail-oriented in their planning and teaching, all perceptions that the NNS also articulated.

The results of the observations, when compared with the teachers' self-reported behaviors, were revealing. In "stark contrast to the claim voiced in the interviews" (p. 366) of a language handicap, the NNSs were observed to be highly proficient and effective users of English in the classroom. Also, while they did indeed use a more structured, textbook-based approach than the NS teachers, the NNS instructors' approach was "in other respects…more varied than the [NSs'] lessons" (p. 367). As for the NSs, despite the claims to the contrary, they were observed to be "keen, active and relaxed teachers…in control of similarly disposed students" (p. 365). On the other hand, some suppositions that the teachers expressed in the interviews were confirmed, such as the validation that the NSs more frequently and accurately gave insights into the target

culture. With regards to the comparison of self-reported and observed behaviors, the authors conclude that "put simply, teachers' perceptions cannot be used as reliable compasses" (p. 368).

Due to the small sample size in this study, I recognize that it may not be advisable to overgeneralize about the findings; nevertheless, I learned two important things from this study which I believe will apply in most L2 teaching contexts. First, NS and NNS did approach teaching the language in slightly different ways, yet both were observed to be effective in their own spheres. I find this conclusion encouraging and in line with my own experience. Secondly, I learned that what we think we do and what we actually do as teachers are likely incongruent and that our self-perception does not necessarily reflect our true style or ability. I think it is of particular note that the NNS teachers considered themselves to be at a linguistic disadvantage, but the observations revealed relatively few instances of deficiencies in their English that impeded their teaching. Similarly, I learned that others' casual perceptions of us are also inaccurate measures of our language or teaching skill and style, and that the only precise measure of language teaching proficiency if that conducted through systematic observations of one teacher at a time.

Having learned some about language teachers' self-perceptions and those of colleagues, I was curious about the perceptions of L2 students regarding NS and NNS teachers. I found an enlightening article on this very issue. **Meadows and Muramatsu (2007)** conducted a study analyzing "student attitudes regarding NS/NNS teachers" (p. 98) in beginning classes of four foreign languages at a university in the United States. The researchers administered a questionnaire to the participants and then compared the responses across languages. Their findings were very interesting to me, particularly as a

Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) teacher. Learners of Chinese, Japanese, and Italian

expressed a slight preference for NS vs NNS as teachers but were "still agreeable to NNS

teachers" (p. 101). Conversely, the SFL students, on average, expressed a slight partiality

toward NNS teachers. The authors hypothesized that this difference in preference might

stem from the "perception that Spanish is somehow less-foreign compared to other

languages" and its "familiarity to American students" (p. 104) due to its prominence in

the United States. What I conclude from this finding is that the NS vs NNS fallacy has

been overcome to some extent with regards to Spanish in the US owing to the plethora of

successful L2 users of Spanish that stand as a striking refutation of the dichotomy.

Students seem to recognize that the NNS status, at least in the case of L2 Spanish users,

does not inhibit them from being highly proficient in the language. If what the authors

and I conclude is true, then what we need in schools and in society to further deconstruct

this fallacious paradigm is the very opposite of what students indicated they prefer, i.e.,

we need *more* highly proficient NNS teachers of all languages. With increased exposure

to skilled NNS teachers, students will be afforded the chance to "rectify the common (but

inaccurate) assumption that NNS teachers have little to offer to the FL classroom" (p.

105).

Meadows and Muramatsu also uncovered another interesting finding with regards

to students' perceptions about L2 users as teachers. When students were asked about

three potential team-teaching scenarios in their foreign language classroom with the

options of pairing NS-NS, NS-NNS or NNS-NNS teachers, the overwhelming majority

indicated that the optimal dyad would be a NS-NNS teacher team. When questioned

about their preference, students "acknowledged the respective expertise which both NS

and NNS teachers possess, and said they would need both to succeed in their language study" (p. 102). As both a language learner and language teacher, I agree with the students that the potential combination of perspectives and abilities that L1 and L2 users of a given language can offer to their students will almost always be superior to what any one teacher, L1 or L2 speaker, can give alone. As an SFL teacher, I should feel confident that my students generally recognize the particular expertise I can provide them as a L2 user of Spanish myself, but I should also encourage them to take Spanish classes from instructors representing a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and language varieties.

After reading about some students' preferences for NS teachers, I was curious about why students might deem L1 users of the language to be more favorable language teachers. I found a study that two Spanish professors, **Hertel and Sunderman (2009)**, carried out that paralleled that of Meadows and Muramatsu (2007), but which delved deeper into the student perceptions of NS vs NNS teachers "with regard to their knowledge of the subject matter, their teaching ability, and [the students'] own learning potential [from the teachers]" (p. 471). I chose this article from among other similar studies because of its explicit focus on Spanish instructors and students, while most other studies were conducted in the English as a second/foreign (ESL, EFL) language context. The authors administered a survey to nearly 300 college students enrolled in Spanish courses at a large American university in which participants rated statements about NS and NNS Spanish teachers' knowledge and ability to teach vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and culture.

The findings that first caught my attention were the perceptions of the students as to which areas of content NSs or NNSs were better suited to teach. Results from the study

supported similar findings from other research dealing with EFL and ESL students'

perceptions, and thus they would appear to capture at least the general views of many L2

students. Hertel and Sunderman discovered that, overall, students believed NS instructors

were better able to teach pronunciation and culture, while on the other hand they

perceived NNS as superior teachers of grammar. Much of the students' logic appealed to

me; L2 users, by nature of their learning process in the language, would be able to help

students better understand the grammar, and L1 speakers could better explain culture as a

result of more exposure to it over more years. However, the reasoning first went awry for

me with regard to the *teaching* of pronunciation. I asked myself, wouldn't an L2 user

who has spent extensive time learning about how to create the sounds correctly in

Spanish, be just as prepared to teach (and I emphasize *teach* vs model) students

pronunciation? If what students meant is that a NNS teacher has a nonnative accent and

will not present a perfect example at all times, of course they're correct, but those same

teachers will likely be able to explain the mouth positions, effective drills, etc., because

they have learned them explicitly. And for that matter, why couldn't a NS who had

studied the grammar at length teach it just as well as a NNS speaker? To make the matter

even more confusing, despite the perceived differences in NS and NNS teachers, students

expressed "no clear preference" (p. 478) when asked which of the two they preferred. In

the same vein, the results revealed that students considered the learning potential from

both NS and NNS to be comparable, with the clearest perceived advantage being learning

pronunciation from a NS. Though the study answered my questions about students'

assessments of teachers' strengths and weaknesses, I was left with many more questions.

I decided to begin addressing my questions by first finding research that would support or challenge the students' assumptions that NS instructors are better teachers of, and more likely to help students improve, target language pronunciation **Levis, Sonsaat, Link and Barriuso (2016)** designed a study to measure the "effectiveness of and perceptions toward native and nonnative pronunciation teachers" (p. 899). Two simultaneous running English pronunciation classes were created, one with a NS teacher and the other with a NNS teacher. Second language users of English were recruited for the classes and were divided into two group of 16 students. Over the course of seven weeks, the two teachers taught identical content each day, even meeting weekly to insure they stayed on the same schedule and used the same activities. The researchers assessed the students' pronunciation before and after the seven weeks, recording spontaneous and read speech from each student which was then evaluated by a group of independent raters for "accentedness and comprehensibility" (p. 908). Additionally, students were interviewed before the intervention about personal language information such as interest in pronunciation, then again following the seven-week period to ascertain their perceptions of NS and NNS as pronunciation teachers in generally and to evaluate their professor specifically.

Not surprisingly to me, given what I had learned from the studies I had already reviewed, the majority of the students expressed a clear preference for a L1 speaker teacher for a pronunciation class, "replying confidently that a native teacher would be better; however, they typically struggled to explain why" (p. 915). In contrast to this expressed preference, the students from the two classes rated their instructors as equally effective pronunciation teachers. In light of this contradiction, the authors concluded that

the students "seemed to believe that having a [native English speaker teacher] would somehow result in greater improvement by 'catching' pronunciation in much the same way one catches a cold, through exposure alone" (p. 916). The quantitative results of the pre- and post-intervention pronunciation ratings indicated that students from both classes achieved comparable improvement, leading the researchers to conclude that "there is no significant impact of teachers' language background on students' overall improvement of comprehensibility and accentedness" (p. 915). Though this study is only one case and was limited to an ESL context, I think the general conclusions can be safely applied in other L2 teaching settings. This study suggests that, provided the teacher of the TL is a proficient user and an effective teacher, he or she can teach pronunciation just as successfully regardless of whether he or she learned the language from birth or later in life. My duty as a teacher then is to do all I can to continue to develop my own pronunciation and learn about Spanish pronunciation and about sound pedagogical practice, and not to worry unduly about my status as an L2 user of the language.

Having settled my mind somewhat as to the myth of the native-speaker teacher's inherent superiority in teaching pronunciation, I continued on to investigate others of the perceived deficiencies of NNS teachers. The students questioned by Hertel and Sunderman (2009) postulated that NNSs were less knowledgeable than NSs in terms of vocabulary but better versed in grammar, and so I searched for empirical evidence that could prove or disprove these claims. In a study of college Spanish instructors, **Gilabert and Galiano (2014)** investigated "the differences in linguistic knowledge among [the instructors] in relation to their native or nonnative status" (p. 1). Specifically, the teachers were evaluated in relation to their knowledge of the vocabulary and grammatical

structures required to teach an intermediate curriculum. To measure the teachers'

comprehension of these two linguistic features, the researchers administered a written test

to the 12 participants (six NSs and six NNSs) that was divided into three content sections:

grammar identification, vocabulary recognition, and a grammar-in-context written

proficiency test. To me, an obvious shortcoming of this test, in relation to assessing

teachers, is that classes are primarily given orally, and thus a written test isn't entirely

reflective of how teacher can use language in the classroom environment. However, to

answer the specific wording of research questions of the study inquiring about teachers'

"grammatical knowledge" and "vocabulary knowledge" (p. 5) it works.

The results of the written test indicated that neither NSs nor NNSs had any

significant gaps in their grammar knowledge, however, L1 Spanish teachers "showed an

advantage in the vocabulary test" (p. 9). What was noted was that the NNSs struggled in

specific semantic fields to which they had likely had less exposure, such as specific

illnesses and indigenous clothing styles. However, in other instances several NS teachers

erred in identifying vocabulary that no NNS missed, such as the case of art terminology. I

concluded from the findings that the breadth of vocabulary that a given teacher knows

has much more to do with life experience and exposure than with native or nonnative

status. However, given that the deficit overall for NNSs was statistically significant I

agree with the authors assertion that "NNS instructors of Spanish must take it upon

themselves to augment their vocabulary knowledge as much as possible" (p. 16). That

being said, I would add that L1 users have the same duty to be ever enlarging their

vocabulary and semantic knowledge.

Gilabert and Galiano (2014) end their article with a suggestion for future research,

claiming that it "must investigate to what extent instructors' knowledge impacts students'

performance" (p. 17). I consider this the most important contribution of this study. It is

informative to demonstrate that the NNSs in this study have a more limited vocabulary

than their NS counterparts but, based on their presumed discrepancy in number of years

of exposure to the language, it is hardly surprising. More importantly, as at least implied

by the findings of Levis, Sonsaat, Link and Barriuso (2016) regarding pronunciation, a

teacher having a larger command of vocabulary is unlikely to be directly correlated to

student vocabulary acquisition, especially when the augmented breadth is in specialized

semantic fields. Obviously, no language teacher, L1 or L2, has a command of all the

vocabulary of English or Spanish, and yet competent users of any language have ways of

overcoming gaps in their semantic knowledge through techniques like circumlocution or

simply using a dictionary. If teachers of any TL are both competent users of the language

(as measured by ability to participate in the TL speech community and/or by more

quantifiable assessments like oral proficiency interviews) and knowledgeable *about* the

language in terms of understanding principles like syntax and morphology, I believe there

are well on their way to successful L2 teaching.

That all being said, I *do* feel an acute obligation as an L2 user and teacher of

Spanish to maintain and improve my skills and knowledge in the language, just as

Gilabert and Galiano (2014) recommend. In my continued analysis of the research

literature, I found a survey of over 100 native and nonnative high school Spanish

teachers, investigating their practices in and out of the classroom intended to maintain

and improve their language skills. I read the article, curious to see if other Spanish

teachers (especially other L2 speakers) had similar methods to my own for retaining and refining their Spanish skills. The finding by **Fraga-Cañadas (2010)** that I encountered are a cause for concern in this regard. I should note that of the 106 teachers who participated in this survey, 91 were NNSs and the other 15 were NSs. Though many teachers expressed that their Spanish skills had improved since graduating from college and entering the classroom, nearly 50% considered that their level of proficiency had either stayed the same or even regressed (p. 400). The habits these teachers expressed give insight into this disturbing trend. While a large percentage indicated that they listened to music in Spanish frequently (75%), those who reported doing other activities like reading the news (54%), watching TV (50%), reading books (29%), etc. in Spanish, were far fewer (p. 406). With regard to spontaneous interpersonal activities such as speaking with colleagues in Spanish and using the target language regularly with students, less than 50 % did either more than occasionally (p. 407). It is hardly surprising to me then that NNS reported that they felt hesitant and uncomfortable using Spanish with their NS coworkers and that so many expressed that their language had regressed or at best plateaued since entering the school system as teachers.

While these results are real cause for concern, I think it is important to note that a little over 50 percent *did* consider that their Spanish language skills had improved since graduating college. Clearly, some instructors had made the effort and seen progress in their proficiency. What I concluded is that, at least in the public-school system in the state in which the survey was conducted, individual teachers must be very proactive if they are to get the additional training and practice they need to maintain and improve their skills. Of the 106 teachers, only ten reported that their schools had provided/sent

them to professional development specific to Spanish proficiency maintenance (p. 403).

Echoing the counsel given by Gilabert and Galiano (2014), the author concludes that it is

important that language teachers, in particular nonnative Spanish teacher, understand that

it takes an significant level of dedication and large time investment to achieve and

maintain advanced proficiency, and adds that "Spanish teachers, whether in their first or

40th year of teaching, must continue the process of learning" by taking "responsibility for

their own learning and growth as professionals" (p. 409). I believe that the antidote to

regressive TL skills for me and for all L2 users as teachers is just what Fraga-Cañadas

outlines: proactive dedication to professional and personal improvement.

As I considered this need for continued language maintenance, I found it

noteworthy that the process for the NNS teacher and that of their students is really

identical, with instructor and pupils all being learners on the same path, separated only by

their respective levels of linguistic competence. As I considered that, I asked myself what

implications that relationship could have on pedagogical practice. I found a very

interesting qualitative study in which **Reynolds-Case (2012)** recorded NNS teachers of

Spanish teaching students that share their L1 to observe how they "use their past learning

experiences as pedagogical tools in their classes" (p. 523). Much as with Árva and

Medgyes' (2000) study, Reynolds-Case also recorded NS teachers and compared their

practices against those of the NNSs. While the differences that the author found were not

large, they were deemed of sufficient consequence to note. NNS instructors were seen to

use "their shared linguistic and cultural L1 background to identity with students' learning

processes, recognize the reasons for grammar errors, and even predict future grammar

errors" (p. 524). While NSs also recognized and warned students of "forms perceived as

difficult" when explaining the differences between the TL and the students' L1, they

reportedly distanced them from the students "through the use of personal pronouns that

impl[ied] differences between the students and the instructor" (e.g. "*you all* in English

say…. *we* in Spanish say it…) (p. 524). A final finding pointed out that NNS instructors

used their own successful strategies and experiences learning Spanish to "offer students

advice and equip them with possible strategies to help them become successful language

learners," while "there were no examples in the data when [NSs] gave personal learning

strategies on how they learned their second language" (p. 534).

Upon reading this article, I immediately took issue with the author's presentation

of the data from this study which I regard as a distortion of the facts in order to meet a

predetermined agenda. In previous studies of the NNS-NS construct, the NS was assumed

to be monolingual and therefore the theory presented in this article (that having been an

L2 learner of the TL the NNS is better equipped to relate to the students and help them

through the acquisition process) would seem to have some validity. However, the author

in this case readily admits that the NSs in question have been successful L2 learners and

"could give strategies and advice on how to successfully learn a second language due to

having learned English" (p. 534) and yet smugly concludes that "there are no examples in

the data" and "they were unable to offer a personal account of how they acquired the

target language, given that it was their native language" (p. 524). The title of the article,

"Exploring How Non-Native Teachers Can Use Commonalties with Students to Teach

the Target Language", seems benign enough, but instead of simply leaving these

interesting findings about NNSs' pedagogical techniques to speak for themselves, the

author felt a need to compare the results with the defenseless, illusory NS, who of course

had no more possibility of telling her students about the SLA techniques she used to learn

her mother tongue than the NNS had of being reborn to Spanish speaking parents and

telling her students about how it was to grow up an L1 Spanish speaker. It appears to me

that the author has simply recreated the false NS-NNS dichotomy, but this time has

turned the tables and painted the NS as the irremediably deficient L2 teacher by sole

virtue of birth in a Spanish-speaking society. I do not discredit the findings regarding the

unique style that L2 users as teachers' use, and as a teacher of my own L2, I

wholeheartedly agree that I can relate and anticipate problems in specific ways because

of my journey along the same path that my students are now traveling. Nevertheless, to

discount the SLA experience of NS teachers just because it is with a different language,

to me is both foolish and arrogant. Furthermore, I posit that L2 teachers deserve to be

considered on their own merits, independent of perceived status as native or nonnative,

and that their language learning experiences should be valued regardless of the language

or context they may have come in.

As I continued to search the literature and reviewed article after article that

condemned and deconstructed this flawed construct, I looked specifically for someone

who not only critiqued the paradigm but who also proposed a viable, judicious, and well

worded alternative. Though I had a variety of my own ideas of how L2 teachers should

be evaluated, I was eager to find a professional opinion that represented my own feelings.

I found just such an article (that also seemed the perfect rebuttal to Reynolds-Case

(2010)) titled "'I May Be a Native Speaker but I'm Not Monolingual': Reimagining All

Teachers' Linguistic Identities in TESOL" (**Ellis, 2016**). Ellis' research is ethnographic

in nature, analyzing the "linguistic biographies" of over two dozen TESOL teachers to

demonstrate their array of linguistic identities and to prove "that the [NS vs NNS] dichotomy does little justice to this complexity" (p. 597). By interviewing the teachers one at a time and taking into account the linguistic experiences of each, Ellis demonstrated that the labels of NS and NNS, when applied to these instructors, shrouded the rich language learning experiences that she argues are "a much more useful and powerful contributor to teacher identity and professional beliefs than their native or nonnative status" (p. 598). This argument matches my own beliefs, rooted in my experiences and reflected in the language biographies that Ellis then shared.

From among the 29 teachers whose linguistic biographies where recorded and analyzed, Ellis described two examples to illustrate how severely the labels of NS and NNS restrict our vision as to teachers' identities and skill sets. The first case is of that of Stan who grew up in England speaking English, but who studied French and German through high school, majored in Swedish at college, continued studying French and added a year each of Italian and Finnish, learned Spanish while in Sweden, and finally settled in Japan where, over 13 years, he developed superior competency in Japanese. The second example is that of Virginia. Virginia grew up speaking Hakka at home and hearing Malay in the community but beginning schooling through the medium of English at age 5, making it her first written language. When her home country became independent when she was 14, she had to learn to read and write Malay as well, then later learned Mandarin as an adult as a requirement for work, and finally Spanish at a university when she immigrated to the United States. Ellis points out that with the blinders of the NS-NNS construct, Stan is just another NS of English who happens to be multilingual and worse, Virginia, who has used English since she was 5 (not to mention

her other SLA experiences), is one more NNS English speaker with a Chinese accent. The author invokes the term plurilingual competency as a means to evaluate the linguistic capabilities of individuals, a term she defines by quoting the Council of Europe: "the repertoire of varieties of language which individuals use, including the first language and any other languages or varieties" while accounting for "a wide range of abilities and gaps in the individual's repertoire" (p. 604). Ellis proposes that the question we should ask an L2 teacher is "*neither* 'are you a native or nonnative?' *nor* 'what variety of [the TL] do you speak?' but rather 'how rich is your linguistic repertoire and how can this be deployed as a pedagogical resource?'" (p. 606). She concludes with a plea for plurilingualism to become "a recognised and celebrated part of the [L2] teacher's toolkit" and for those teachers who are monolingual to "feel encouraged and supported to view the learning of and use of additional languages as a key and necessary part of ongoing professional development" (p. 626). Ellis' words echo many of my own thoughts, offering corroboration of my vision for how L2 teachers' proficiency should be evaluated in a way that avoids applying limiting labels and that considers teachers and what they have to offer on an individual basis.

As I reflect on the many insights I have gained through analyzing the literature about the alleged NS vs NNS teacher discrepancy, three themes stand out to me. First, I feel a real, perceptible increase in confidence as an L2 user and teacher of Spanish. I have found an abundance of evidence that, both qualitatively and quantitatively, affirms that I can be just as successful in helping my students acquire my L2 as my L1, provided that I maintain a high level of both communicative and pedagogic competence. Secondly, closely tied to the first theme, I feel an even greater desire and responsibility than before

to constantly deepen and broaden my language skills, and to build my growing awareness of the links between SLA and instructed language learning. I believe, now more than ever, that this conscious path of lifelong language learning is key to both being an effective user and teacher of languages. In an experience I had taking a beginning Chinese class, I gained many insights that helped me improve as a language teacher. Furthermore, this continued learning process can serve as a shining example to my students and to all other language learners. Finally, I have learned that the notion that being a NS or NNS of a language is, in and of itself, a qualification for or guarantee of successful L2 teaching is totally erroneous. I am reminded yet again that effective teaching and learning is always connected to knowing and acknowledging people as individuals and evaluating the ability of teachers is no exception. Each teacher comes from a unique situation, with particular linguistic experiences, and various pedagogic strengths. Only on that individual basis can we or should we venture to assess who is or is not a successful second language teacher.

VOCABULARY TEACHING AND LEARNING

When I first started working as a Spanish language tutor several years ago, I remember feeling frustrated when students came in to practice and we would end up spending the majority of the time learning vocabulary before we could discuss the topics at hand. Once they had a grasp of some basic vocabulary related to the theme, we would proceed with a conversations or grammar practice, but without the necessary lexical items, we could do almost nothing. I faced a similar situation when I begin teaching Spanish and later English as a foreign language and repeatedly asked myself about the nature of vocabulary learning, especially how to help students prepare so that they could actively participate and use the language each class period. More recently, in light of what I had learned during my time in the MSLT program about grammar acquisition, I have been particularly curious to see what experts and research had to say about the explicit learning of vocabulary versus the implicit acquisition of new words. Based on a review of databases and reference lists about vocabulary in second language (L2) learning I pinpointed two researchers whose work I would use as the starting point of my reading: Norbert Schmitt and Paul Nation.

   Schmitt (2008) wrote a review of research in second language vocabulary learning that covered a wide range of topics, including intentional versus implicit vocabulary learning. In the review, he argues that whereas contemporary language teaching paradigms highlight learning language features like grammar structures implicitly through meaning-based use of the language, "there are good reasons to believe to that vocabulary requires a different approach which incorporates explicit attention to learning the lexical items themselves" (p. 341). He goes on to list a number of reasons

that this is true and concludes by stating that "the main reason for an explicit focus on vocabulary is that it is effective", that even though "research has demonstrated that vocabulary can accrue from incidental exposure, intentional vocabulary learning almost always leads to greater and faster gains, with a better chance of retention and of reaching productive levels of mastery" (p. 341). He further maintains that a key to the mastery of vocabulary is "maximizing engagement" (p. 342) of the learner with the words, a term he uses to encompass a "virtually anything that that leads to more […], attention, manipulation, or time spent on lexical items" (p. 339), all tenants of an explicit approach to learning.

The author does not, however, discount the value of incidental vocabulary learning. After highlighting studies that demonstrate the benefits of several types of explicit vocabulary teaching, he goes on to cite numerous authors whose research also show the utility of incidental vocabulary learning through reading and listening. While the studies confirm that the pick-up rate for unknown words is low, incidental learning "is very useful in developing and enriching *partially known* vocabulary" (p. 348). Each exposure to the word increases different types of knowledge about the word (e.g., phrasal and idiomatic use, frequency of use, collocation, etc.) and helps to consolidate and expand on the "fragile initial learning" (p. 348). Schmitt notes that based on the research, repeated exposure and recycling are key to mastery of new vocabulary, He concludes that intentional and incidental methods are "not only complementary, but positively require each other" (p. 353), given the distinct roles the two play in reaching a mastery of L2 vocabulary, including productive abilities.

After reading Schmitt (2008) I was eager to compare his conclusions about explicit and implicit vocabulary learning with the ideas of Paul Nation, the most cited L2 vocabulary researcher wherever I searched. In his book *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, **Nation (2013)** explains his ideal approach to second language teaching and learning, specifically that "a well-balanced language course should consist of four major strands" (p. 2), meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. He clarifies that implicit learning and vocabulary reinforcement through extensive input are essential, but echoes Schmitt in underscoring the important place that explicit vocabulary study has in the L2 learning process. Applying his four-strand approach specifically to vocabulary, he explains how the language-focused learning strand is dedicated to the direct teaching and learning of vocabulary, intensive reading, as well as training students on effective vocabulary learning strategies. I was particularly intrigued by the prospect of strategies and techniques that we can teach our students to help them be more autonomous learners, especially give the frustration with vocabulary teaching that initiated my study of this topic in the first place.

Nation presents a variety of strategies for vocabulary learning, ranging from initial L1-L2 word association learning techniques, to learning word parts, to tactics for guessing words in context. Chapter 11, "Deliberate learning from word cards" was of specific interest to me. As an L2 learner, I have long viewed vocabulary flashcards as a valuable learning strategy, but in view of contemporary second language acquisition (SLA) research and L2 teaching practices, I had wondered at times if it was a worthwhile investment of time. Nation not only defends the use of word cards for vocabulary

learning, but robustly endorses the practice. He points out that L2 learners have intuitively used this method for centuries and that more recently the research has borne out the effectiveness *and* efficiency of the exercise. Included in this endorsement however, are several important things to consider. First, the author reiterates what he and Schmitt both emphasize throughout their works: that vocabulary learning is a cumulative process, requiring a breadth of knowledge about each word that only comes over time, and thus using flashcards to learn vocabulary is just one initial step in mastering a word. Secondly, though using bilingual flashcards may be frowned on by some, research demonstrates that at beginning and intermediate stages of L2 learning, the L1 and L2 are inevitable associated and the use of the L1 can be a powerful tool to speed up the initial learning process, until learners can effectively use only the L2. Lastly, Nation points out that not all word card formats or study practices are created equal. Nation details a number of techniques both for making cards and studying them, that optimize their usefulness in establishing the words in the learners' memory, for example, spacing repetitions to increase recall, using mnemonics or picture associations, avoiding putting similarly spelled words and synonyms together, including example phrases, saying words out loud while reviewing, learning phrase rather than only single words, etc. With this overview of word card use for initial vocabulary learning, I was eager to learn more about some specifics of the learning process and read empirical studies about the implementation of flashcards. I decided to begin by learning about the mental process of learning new words, to see how the ideas of Schmitt and Nation fit within a cognitive explanation of vocabulary learning.

Ma (2017) presents a "memory-based strategic model for vocabulary learning" (p. 46) that helps explain the mental process of information moving from initial noticing to storage in long-term memory. The model "proposes two four-stage parallel vocabulary learning processes" (p. 46), in which at each stage an internal, unobservable cognitive process has a corresponding external, observable behavior. Summarized, first the word is perceived by the brain, then the meaning must be identified, next the new word is "established as a new L2 lexical entry in the mental lexicon by connecting the existing meaning (initially in L1 translation and later in L2 meaning) with the new word form via repetition, imagery, or rhyme, and so on" (p. 46), and finally the memory trace is strengthened "each time the newly learned word is retrieved from the mental lexicon for receptive or productive use" (p. 47). Though I do not believe that a translation is necessary for the new word to be established, but I do believe that at least initially, the new entries are linked with our L1 lexical representations (Dong, Gui, & MacWhinney, 2005).

Ma goes on to analyses a number of lexical applications (computer and mobile) for language learning and explains how each functions within the model of cognition, including a section about flashcards. Though the flashcards she talks about are digital, the description she provides applies to paper and electronic word cards. She explains that flashcards are particularly helpful for the third and fourth steps of the memory process: mapping the meaning and the form of words, and consolidating the vocabulary in long-term memory. The flashcard applications she mentions work on a principle of "spaced repetition and retrieval" (p. 51), ideas that Nation (2013) also mentions. However, in the case of these digital flashcards, the system is much more efficient and automatically

spaces the cards over time for the learner to go back and review (as opposed to the

manual system with paper cards proposed by Nation). The learner reviews the cards, rates

his or her knowledge of the lexical item, and the software program automatically

schedules a review time based on the information. I was intrigued with this information

and wanted to know more, but because Ma's coverage of spaced repetition, digital

flashcards, and the power of retrieval to store knowledge in long-term memory were only

cursorily addressed in her paper (her focus being the broader review of technologies for

L2 vocabulary teaching and learning), I needed to find other sources that addressed these

topics.

I began by finding some articles about the effects of word retrieval on memory.

Barcroft (2007) conducted a study to assess the effects "of allowing leaners time for

word retrieval during picture-based intentional L2 vocabulary learning" (p. 41). He

defines retrieval as the "process of accessing stored information" (p. 36). He notes in his

review of relevant literature that though the topic has been studied a good deal in

psychology, a closer look is needed with regards to retrieval in the context of L2

vocabulary learning. In particular, most of the research conducted in psychology and

memory science, has focused on previously learned words while "only a limited amount

of research has been conducted on word retrieval and memory for new words (memory

for word forms and form-meaning mappings) within the long-term process of L2

vocabulary learning." (p. 38). Additionally, Barcroft notes the lack of studies directly

comparing retrieval and non-retrieval conditions.

In the study that the author carried out, 24 L2 Spanish students were exposed to

two learning conditions for learning vocabulary. Half of the students learned words 1-12

with the retrieval condition and words 11-24 with the control condition, while the other half learned the same 24 words but with reverse conditions (1-12 control, 11-24 retrieval). To begin, both groups saw all 24 pictures-word pairs for three seconds each. Following that, they saw the words again, but this time under the two conditions. In the control condition the Spanish word was shown together with the picture for 12 seconds, and in the retrieval condition, the picture was shown for six seconds without the written word, then another six seconds with the word and picture together (thus giving students time to retrieve the target word based on the picture before the word was shown). Immediately after the two steps of exposure, all of the students took a posttest in which they wrote the Spanish words that they could remember beside the corresponding picture. They also took another, identical posttest two days later, followed by a third a week after the second.

The results demonstrated that the retrieval condition had a positive effect, consistent across all three posttests. Barcroft notes that this is consistent with similar studies and states that the findings support the conclusion that "the act of retrieving the item[s] modifies the learner's existing memory representation system such that encoding of the item is strengthened" (p. 49). Though this size of the study was small, given that the results are consistent with other studies, it provides more empirical support to the ideas put forth by Schmitt (2008), Nation (2013), and Ma (2017) about the role of retrieval and recycling in L2 vocabulary learning.

Having learned more about the power of retrieval, I next looked for studies about the role of spaced repetition for learning vocabulary. What I encountered was an interesting and somewhat confusing array of findings. In all of the journal articles that I

read, the authors unanimously agree that space repetition study (i.e., reviewing words several times spaced over several minutes, hours, or days) was more effective than the same number of reviews massed together in a single sitting, but there was not a consensus about whether expanding the time between reviews or using equal spacing between study sessions was more effective. I quickly realized that the question I should be asking was not *if* spaced repetition works, but rather what type of spaced repetition is better.

Karpicke and Bauernschmidt (2011), for example, had college students learn Swahili-English word pairs, then practice recalling them on several different schedules. In this study they focused on absolute spacing (total time over which recall sessions were carried out) and relative spacing (the spacing pattern, in this case expanding, equal, and contracting). In short, they found that a longer absolute spacing schedule lead to greater final recall, but that the way in which the sessions were spaced did not have a significant impact on the final ability to remember the word pairs. For example, students who did three recall sessions spaced over a 90-minute period demonstrated better recall that those who also did three recall sessions spaced over a 30-minute period, who in turn showed better recall that those who studied three times in 15 minutes. Nevertheless, for all students who did their practices over the 90-minute period, whether they studied on a 30-30-30 or 15-30-45 schedule, there was no statistically significant difference. It is important to note that the participants were not studying Swahili beyond the context of the study, when generalizing the findings to L2 learners, nevertheless I find the results relevant with regards to spaced repetition for memorizing new words.

In contrast, in a study by **Nakata (2015)** the results "demonstrated a limited yet statistically significant advantage of expanding spacing" (p. 677). The study followed a

similar format to that of Karpicke and Bauernschmidt (2011), but with Japanese students in EFL classes studying the target English-Japanese word pairs on a computer program, following different schedules manipulating absolute and relative spacing. A control group, which did all of their reviews in mass, was also included. Nakata's study contained a few notable differences from Karpicke and Bauernschmidt's (2011), specifically the inclusion of feedback after each recall practice (showing the English word, the Japanese translation and the participant's response), the use of productive rather than receptive retrieval, and the administration of a second posttest a full week after the study sessions. On average for both the first and delayed posttests, those who used the expanding practice schedule outscored those who used the equal spacing schedule. Nakata hypothesizes that the productive study practice may have made the difference, since "productive retrieval is more demanding than receptive retrieval and because a significant expanding retrieval effect tends to be observed when the task difficulty is high" (p. 699). Whatever the cause, spaced repetition was superior in this case.

Interestingly, **Schuetze (2015)**, came to a similar conclusion about expanding spaced repetition as a result of his study, but with a caveat: the expanding schedule of study was only superior for short-term gains, while uniformed spacing showed better long-term results. The format of this particular study addressed one of my chief concerns from the other such studies I had read, namely the length of the intervention. In all of the previous experiments, the learning and recall practice occurred over a very short period of time (less than two hours), nothing like the experience of a language course, but in this study the author presented the words over the course of more than two weeks. This study

was also unique in that the English-German word pairs were presented with a

demonstration for how to pronounce the word in German. As with similar studies that I

read, one group followed an expanding schedule of recall practice, and the other a

uniformly spaced schedule. The author administered posttests, one day after, four weeks

after, and eight weeks after the last session of practice. The results of the posttests

showed that initially the students who learned the words on the expanding spaced

schedule displayed higher rates of recall, but by the eight-week point, the learners from

the uniform schedule had a higher rate. However, it is important to note that the

difference between the groups was never statistically significant, something the author

himself admits but does not emphasize enough in my opinion.

After reviewing the various articles focused on spaced repetition, there appears to

be no clear answer about which type of practice schedule, expanding or equal spacing, is

optimal for learning vocabulary. Furthermore, given the format of the studies, they

necessarily focused on relatively small amounts of vocabulary when compared with what

students might be required to learn in an average language class. Additionally, these

studies focused on L1/L2 equivalent pairs, and though translations may not be

cognitively necessary to learn new L2 vocabulary there is evidence suggesting that due to

the overlap of L1 and L2 semantic representations this practice may work reasonably

well (Van de Putte, De Baene,Price, & Duycka, 2018). Even given these factors, several

things seem sufficiently conclusive as to be applicable for students enrolled in a language

course. First, spaced repetition is much more effective than bunched repetitions for

solidifying vocabulary knowledge in the learner's mind. Additionally, productive use of

the vocabulary while practicing recall requires more cognitive effort and leads to a

stronger mental trace for that item. Lastly, feedback while working on retrieval has a powerful effect on retention (e.g., looking at the back on a flashcard to see the correct answer or confirmation from another speaker), and learners should incorporate it as they study in order for optimal learning to occur.

With all of these findings about retrieval and spaced repetition in mind, I still had a lingering question: How is deliberate learning of vocabulary related to vocabulary acquisition? In other words, can words learned via purposeful methods like flashcards become "acquired"? **Elgort (2011)** addressed this very topic and used a trio of experiments to arrive at some groundbreaking conclusions. The author explains that since the shift in the 1980's toward communicative approaches to L2 teaching that emphasize acquiring knowledge of the language in context, a counter argument has been made that such an approach is insufficient for L2 vocabulary learning. In the vein of that argument, many studies have been conducted showing the effectiveness of deliberate vocabulary learning and even demonstrating superiority on retention rates compared with incidental conditions, but word knowledge in nearly all cases was measured via explicit knowledge tests. Nevertheless, that "it cannot be automatically assumed that the quality of vocabulary knowledge gained through deliberate decontextualized learning is at the level that is needed for real language use" (p. 368), bringing us back to the learning/acquisition question.

Thus, the challenge facing Elgort was to design a study that measured the implicit word knowledge of the participants, or the ability to access the knowledge for online (fluent) comprehensive or productive use. She designed a laboratory study using priming manipulations which measure how the presentation of word (the prime) proceeding the

target word, affect the speed of recognition (access to the word's representation in the mental lexicon) of the target word. This design was chosen because it can be used to measure the strength of implicit representations and because it eliminates other factors that influence normal reading or conversations. The forty-eight participants studied a list of 48 pseudowords, followed a prescribed learning schedule using flashcards with the vocabulary item on one side and a short definition on the other. After a week of study, and after demonstrating their explicit knowledge of the words on a productive written test, they participated in the three main primed tests.

In the experiments, participants had to make a rapid word/nonword decision based on the string of letter that flashed on the computer screen. Each target word was proceeded by a prime word. Depending on the type of prime (word/nonword, similar orthography, similar meaning, etc.) and arrangement (masked or unmasked), the response time changed, indicating if the prime was fully integrated formally and lexically in the learners' minds. The 48 pseudowords were used as primes to measure their strength of mental integration. Based on the results of the three tests, the author concluded that indeed, deliberate learning had created a mental lexical representation of the 48 words with a level of fluent access comparable to the existing L1 or L2 knowledge that users draw on in real language use. The results show that deliberate learning "is not only an efficient and convenient but also a very effective method of L2 vocabulary acquisition" and that "this suggests that, as far as L2 vocabulary is concerned, the hypothesis regarding the learning/acquisition dichotomy is not justified" (p. 399). She does however hasten to add that given the nature of vocabulary and acquisition, other types of learning and exposure in meaningful contexts are needed in order to "develop more stable lexical-

semantic representations of the new words and to fully integrate them into the lexical-semantic networks of the learner" (p. 395), as well as to develop "pragmatic and sociocultural knowledge need to understand and use L2 vocabulary successfully" (p. 400).

These findings were very exciting to me, but two things about the study design left me with some doubts. First, all of the participants were advanced speakers of the L2 *and* the word cards used were exclusively in the L2. Additionally, I was unsure how/if these results could be applied to the beginning and intermediate L2 learners that I had in mind when I began this study of the research literature.

Conveniently, **Elgort and Piasecki (2014)** addressed these very issues in a study that replicated Elgort's earlier experiments, shifting to a mixture of intermediate and high L2 learners and the use of bilingual flashcards in place of within-L2 cards. Interestingly, the results of the experiments showed that the bilingual condition still allowed all participants to create "robust orthographic representations of the studied items" (p. 572), but that only the leaners with higher L2 vocabularies created high-quality semantic representations. The authors hypothesized that perhaps the overall weakness of the L2 semantic structure in the minds of the intermediate learners was the cause of these results. They point out that this again proves that the ability to explicitly access a word's form "does not tell us much about the quality of lexical knowledge" (p. 584). They also urge L2 instructors to encourage students to use within-L2 flashcards as much as possible. I agree with their assessment, but recognize too that for students at beginning levels of lexical proficiency, L1-L2 cards are the most common and nearly unavoidable. That being said, we can encourage students to use pictures and other means to facilitate

stronger lexical representations from the very beginning. Also, any words that I would assign students to learn deliberately would ideally be used in succeeding classes, providing prompt opportunities to improve the semantic strength of the initial, formal representation.

Thinking more about this need for a blend of explicit and implicit vocabulary learning led me to read a study by **Laufer and Rozovski-Roitblat (2015)** that assessed the effects of three task types and three different number of exposures on target vocabulary knowledge. The tasks included reading only (incidental exposure with nothing to call attention to the target words - **R**), reading plus focus on form (reading with a dictionary and a true-false test that required comprehension of the target vocabulary - **F**), and reading with focus on forms (a single exposure to the word in the reading, followed by a variety of vocabulary focused activities **1+Fs**). The treatment was carried out over 11 weeks of an English class with 185 EFL students.

The post intervention tests, give unannounced two weeks after the conclusion of the treatment included four measures: active recall, passive recall, active recognition, and passive recognition. The results of the tests revealed that the focus on forms (**1+Fs**) "produced significantly better results than **F** and **R**" across all four measures of word knowledge, and reading plus focus on form (**F**) "with 2-3, 4-5, and 6-7 encounters yielded similar results to **R** with 6&7, 12&15, and 18&21 respectively" (p. 700). Remarkably, even at the lowest number of encounters in the **1+Fs** condition (once in text + 1-2 times in exercises), the results were better than the **R** condition at the highest number of encounters (18-21), in all four measures. That is to say, that the combination of reading and explicitly practicing the words, even when it was only three times over 11

weeks, produced greater recall than reading words in context between 18-21 times. What is more, the low levels of recall from reading cannot be attributed to lack of communicative context or lack of comprehensibility because the students wrote coherent summaries of the text, indicating understanding. Indeed, as the authors conclude, "what learners do with the word may be more important than how many times they come across it, since it is the nature of the task that determines how effective multiple encounters will be" (p. 707). These results offer additional strong support to the argument for some explicit vocabulary teaching and learning, especially in conjunction with communicative use, in the context of an L2 course. My one reservation with this study is that the measure of vocabulary is explicit which does not tell me enough about the quality or depth of knowledge. I would be very interested to see the methods and measures used by Elgort (2011) applied to this study to see what the participants can do with the lexical knowledge in an online context, to see if the mental representation created by the intervention is sound enough for fluent retrieval and use.

With the combined understanding I had gained about these various cognitive elements involved in learning vocabulary, I was ready to take a closer look at flashcards as a form of deliberate vocabulary learning, in particular the digital version mentioned by Ma (2017). **Nakata and Webb (2016)** used a "Technique Feature Analysis" (p. 123) to analyze the efficacy of several common activities used to deliberately learn L2 vocabulary, among them flashcard use. The assessment they used has 18 criteria "that have been found to facilitate L2 vocabulary learning based on previous empirical research" (p. 124) and gives one point for each measure met. Not surprisingly, many of the criteria draw on the areas of research that I had just studied (e.g., recall, spaced study,

etc.). Given what I had learned up this point, I was not surprised to see that learning with

flashcards was the highest scoring activity that the authors analyzed (12/18). Notably,

flashcard use got high marks on criterion related to clear learning goals, noticing,

retrieval, and retention. Conversely, it lost points because it does not promote negotiation

of meaning or generation (using familiar words in novel contexts). However, these

criteria would be met if the words learned were then used in a classroom task.

The authors make two points that I found to be particularly relevant to my

ongoing study. First, throughout their analysis of flashcard use, they repeatedly pointed

out the advantages afforded by digital flashcards (compared to traditional paper ones).

For example, they note the facility to include pictures and audio recordings of native

speakers, the automatic record keeping ability of the digital card systems, the automated

and adjustable spaced repetition software, the motivational nature of some digital

flashcards that note milestones and record progress, the flexibility and ease of creating

digital cards, and so on. Secondly, they emphasized the importance of making students

aware of ways to use the cards efficiently in order to take full advantage of the potential

benefits. For instance, they need to know that they should do both receptive and

productive vocabulary retrieval practice, including oral and written (typed) production

and aural and reading reception. Also, we should warn them about the negative effects of

studying semantically related words together (e.g., lists of foods, animals, etc) and the

effectiveness instead of thematic grouping (brown, bear, hair, dangerous). Though the

authors do not mention it specifically, I would include that learners need to know about

the advantage of using the L2 and pictures as much as possible versus relying exclusively

on L1 equivalents. I find it noteable that all of these techniques are facilitated when using digital flashcards.

As I read more about digital word cards, I came to the realization that it was not just explicit vocabulary learning or even technology-mediated vocabulary development (TMVD) that most interested me, but specifically the possibilities afforded by mobile assisted vocabulary learning (MAVL) (Elgort, 2018; Gürkan, 2018; Ma, 2017). I realized that all of the power of digitation I had read about so far, *combined* with the ubiquitous and mobile nature of mobile devices had great potential to help solve my initial problem – better preparing students to participate in communicative tasks without using precious face-to-face time reviewing vocabulary. The findings of a study by **Nikoopour and Kazemi (2014)** supported the vision I was beginning to form for MAVL in my own language classes. In the experiment conducted over a ten-week period, 109 English language students studied 700 vocabulary words using flashcards. The students were divided into three groups, and each group was assigned a different type of flashcard: mobile, online, or paper. Each week throughout the intervention 70 new words were added, either digitally via the mobile and online software, or by giving out a new stack of 70 cards in the case of the paper-based group. Short, multiple-choice tests were given four times, spaced throughout the ten weeks to provide motivation, with longer pretests and posttests administered to assess vocabulary learning. Questionnaires and interviews were also used to evaluate the attitudes and experience of the participants at the end of the study.

Two results from the study struck me as most interesting and relevant to my investigation. Number one, the students who studied using the digital flashcards (mobile

and online) as a group significantly outperformed the learners who used non-digital cards, and when compared as three individual groups, the mobile flashcard users demonstrated significantly better recall than both the online and paper card groups on the posttest. Number two, the attitudes of the mobile flashcard users toward their mode of learning was significantly more positive than that of the leaners using other types of flashcards. In the interviews, they noted that they studied much more during leisure time than they had before the intervention because of the convenience of having the words in hand. The portability and ease of using mobile devices to study vocabulary seemed to be the primary cause of the superior achievement in vocabulary learning for that group.

Though I recognize that the measure of vocabulary in this study was a multiple-choice test and therefore not necessarily indicative of acquisition, the design of the intervention is very enlightening. In my own classes, I can do something similar that I believe will aid students in vocabulary learning for better class participation. If I plan my lessons carefully, weeks in advance, I can prepare requisite vocabulary clusters for each class based on the tasks and assign them days before the upcoming lesson. Via an appropriate mobile app, students can make quality word cards and use the spaced repetition software to study words as their convenience in preparation to use them in class. Training in making quality cards would likely be needed (Ma, 2017). Because many of these apps keep records of the students' progress, and in some cases even send those results to a course administrator, I have a means of evaluating progress and participation, and even a measure for assigning a grade if desired. In this way I can help students with initial, deliberate vocabulary learning and prepare them to use the language in context where they will reinforce and expand on that preliminary learning.

What I also discovered is that in some cases the flashcard apps have crowdsourcing capabilities (engaging a group of people in a common task or information sharing) that tap into the social features of the learning process and connect students as a community of learners. **Wu (2015)** conducted a study using one vocabulary application that employs crowdsourcing and spaced repetition software, *Memrise*, to help students learn to recognize and write Chinese characters. Users in *Memrise* can share Mems, or mnemonic devices using animated gifs, pictures, explanations, sample phrase, etc. to give each other ideas and to make learning easier together. The students in the study not only showed better results on the writing and reading tests post-intervention, but they overwhelmingly reported positive experiences using the application. They specifically mentioned that they enjoyed the Mem sharing capability, the reminders to study the vocabulary that they received on their mobile devices, and the pronunciation examples included with the characters. This added component of collaboration greatly appeals to me, given that one of my main goals as an instructor is to create a cooperative learning community in my class. I firmly believe that a sense of community in a language class is key to affective and social security, which in turn increases learning, so if I can use an application that prepares students with some basic vocabulary knowledge and promotes community at the same time, I believe it is a worth investment of time.

I concluded my examination of relevant research literature about L2 vocabulary learning and MAVL by reading two recent articles with some important reminders and suggestions with regard to the use of mobile devices in L2 learning. **Lotherington (2018)** evaluated some of the most popular language learning apps by signing up and using them to learn Italian for several weeks. She unequivocally labeled them all disappointments as

standalone language learning systems, based on outdated theories of language learning and failing to exploit the global connectivity of mobile devices. What most caught my attention however, were her reminders about using mobile devices effectively. She states that "working with a device technologically extends the individual's potential, but it is indeed what one does with the machine that is the message" (p. 211). She advocates for teachers to be activists rather than pliant consumers who allow app developers to drive the L2 learning narrative, specialists who "strategically weave existing apps into customized language courses" using "professional understanding of living literacies and contemporary pedagogies" (p. 212). Lotherington even uses the case of Wu's (2015) research about Memrise as an example of how to incorporate mobile technologies into a course. She includes suggestions to use multimodal communication, peer connectivity, collaborative textual creation, and several other functions of mobile devices to take full advantage of the "new media affordances in constructive and imaginative ways" (p. 212). Though these suggestions apply in varying degrees to the rather narrow scope of MAVL that I was focused on, she includes excellent suggestions about the possibilities for authentic, multimodal language use available via mobile devices. Also, her reminder about carefully using devices to extend our possibilities based on sound, contemporary SLA research but not expecting technology for the sake of technology to solve problems, is very relevant and important for me to remember as I consider using mobile apps to address the problem of time-consuming vocabulary pre-teaching in my classes.

Godwin-Jones (2018) echoes Lotherington (2018) and calls for more imaginative use of mobile devices for language learning, specifically in the contextualization of vocabulary learning. He points out that we are increasingly aware of the "complex and

multidimensional" (p. 1) nature of lexical development in L2 learners where words are open systems that become more robust, complex, and complete with each contextualized contact, and that modern technology can play an important role in that process. While he acknowledges that technology is also valuable for explicit word study, mentioning in particular the power of digital flashcard that use spaced repetition software, he specifically advocates for a more conscious use of technology to generate contextualized encounters with L2 vocabulary. He points to the extensive reading, watching, and game playing opportunities available via the internet in the target language. He also mentions the possibilities of interactions on social media and many other types of digital networking and interaction that gives the vocabulary communicative life. He concludes by urging instructors to take advantage of online domains to complement the contextualization of vocabulary that they already do in face-to-face situations. His words inspired me and I hope to find more level-appropriate resources and point my students toward them, in order to foster more opportunities for real-world contact with the language. In light of what I have learned about vocabulary learning, I think it is appropriate to encourage them follow the routine that I have of noting down new words and incorporating them into my explicit vocabulary study. This combination of contextualized, implicit learning and deliberate learning will surely enlarge their overall lexical knowledge and boost their communicative competence in the L2.

My principal objective when I began my study was to understand the roles of explicit learning and acquisition in L2 vocabulary so that I could improve my students' classroom interaction in a time efficient manner. I conclude with the key principles that I learned about and their implications for solving my problem.

I have learned that the deliberate learning of L2 vocabulary is an important objective within the larger goal of L2 proficiency, and that the dichotomy between learning and acquisition may not even be applicable in the case of vocabulary. I learned that such direct learning can lead to the initial encoding of L2 vocabulary in the learner's mental lexicon, and that that trace is subsequently strengthened by repeated retrieval spaced over a period of time, ideally a long time. Additionally, that mental representation broadens and becomes more robust with each encounter the learner has with the given lexical item in communicative contexts. I have also learned that word cards, particularly digital flashcards, when used in a way that is based on current understanding of vocabulary learning, can be a powerful tool for individual and social learning, and an excellent way to initially internalize or solidify lexical items. Finally, I was reminded that the possibilities that mobile devices afford for contextualized/implicit as well as deliberate/explicit vocabulary acquisition are nearly limitless, but must assessed and applied judiciously, based on current understanding of L2 learning, in order to be beneficial.

Based on all that I have learned, I believe that a well-designed, well implemented, mobile flashcard regimen can be one effective way to better help students to prepare for and participate in activities, and to maximize class time for communicative tasks. This takes advantage of the mobile, digital, and interactive reality of my twenty-first century students to aid in L2 acquisition. For this to work, I need to train students in effective study techniques and help them to use the tools efficiently. Most importantly, students must recognize that this practice of deliberate vocabulary learning is only a sub-goal to,

and not tantamount to L2 learning which can only come through extensive

communication in the target language.

LOOKING FORWARD

Learning a new language opens doors and brings a thrill and satisfaction that few other accomplishments can match. After three years in the MSLT program, I have a much better grasp of how to help others effectively and efficiently learn languages so that they too can experience the opportunities and fulfilment that accompany the process. I am considering pursuing a doctoral degree in second language education in order to continue expanding on that knowledge and to be in a position to implement programs and approaches on a larger scale that will improve how languages are taught. Alternatively, I have considered going straight into teaching English and/or Spanish as second languages full time, domestically or abroad. Though I do not know exactly in what capacity, I expect to be part of helping others learn languages for many years to come.

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