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EDITOR

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The TFLTA Journal is an online, peer-reviewed publication of TFLTA, the Tennessee Foreign Language Teaching Association, an affiliate of ACTFL. The journal is dedicated to publishing original scholarly articles that address all aspects of second language teaching (i.e., research, innovative instructional methods and techniques, new curriculum paradigms, assessment trends, policy and accountability issues, and linguistic and cultural topics) that are of interest to modern, classical and second language educators in the K-16 global arena. Submissions are accepted year-round and inquiries to the Editor are most welcome (pdwiley@utk.edu). Please refer to Submission Guidelines for specific criteria for potential manuscripts for this publication.

The TFLTA Journal

Spring 2013

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Message from the Editor

The Spring 2013 issue of the peer-reviewed, online *TFLTA Journal* offers its readership a robust selection of eight original articles from international and domestic world and second language scholars. The foci of these manuscripts include innovative, research-informed, pedagogical approaches (linguistic, theoretically-grounded, literary-based and digital) which have been field-tested in classroom settings. Seven of the eight pieces present empirical research studies conducted by our L2 colleagues in Michigan, Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, Israel, New York, Iran and Thailand and reported for the first time in this journal.

Stacey Margarita Johnson invites us in to her first semester Spanish course to examine *What Did They Learn?*... and describes how the theory of transformative learning can provide a useful framework for exploring adults' Spanish learning experiences and for evaluating how this learning compares with the national world language learning standards.

The results of Paul B. Mandell's study, *Do L2 Spanish Learners Attend to Verb Morphology?* challenge a paradigm supported by previously- published literature's findings on this issue, thereby suggesting that adult learners approach verb morphology in a different way than what has been heretofore commonly believed.

The Simple Past and Present Perfect in Peninsular Spanish article, presented by Darren Broome, gives the reader a look at the inconsistencies present in verb usage for both Peninsular Spanish and Latin American Spanish, grounding his work in a novel by José Ángel as a point of reference.

In-service high school Spanish educators, Ruth Valle and McConkey take us on a *Green Screening Around the World* virtual tour of how they have set-up and currently use this new technology in their classrooms to not only promote collaborative learning with students and their teachers but also strengthen students' content area knowledge.

Quality Assurance in EFL Proficiency Assessment in a Tertiary Educational Context, written by Carol Goldfus and Irit Ferman, examines the reliability and validity of a test which has been designed and implemented as a new tool for assessing the required EFL proficiency level of students in an EFL teacher education program.

Bettina P. Murray describes her innovative use of fable writing as a means to increase literary development and cultural awareness in her research article, *Students Born in the United States and Foreign Born English Language Learners (ELLs)*

Reza Norouzian and her colleague, Zohreh Eslami suggest that previously-accepted results from published theory-based research investigating error feedback in an EFL setting, are open to doubt following the results of their own empirical study entitled, *Applying Teacher Feedback: Grounded Theory Perspective*.

A Comparative Study of Discourse Connectors Used in Argumentative Compositions of Thai EFL Learners and English-Native Speakers examines the use of discourse connectors (DCs) in argumentative compositions of Thai- and English-native college students. The results of Pansa Prommas and Kemtong Sinwongsuwat study have useful applications for all teachers teaching basic writing skills.

Patricia Davis-Wiley, Editor

Call for Papers and Submission Information for Authors

The TFLTA Journal Volume 5 Fall 2013/Spring 2014

The Editorial Board of *The TFLTA Journal* would like to invite you to submit original scholarly articles (i.e., research conducted in the second language classroom; language approaches/strategies; digital literacies; meta-analyses; assessment issues; context and content-based instruction; assessment measures; cultural issues; position papers) of interest to K-16 world language (modern, classical and second languages) educators in the global arena.

The deadline for the Fall 2013/Spring 2014 issue of the journal is January 15, 2014, to allow ample time for a blind review of submitted manuscripts and the editing of accepted articles. Earlier submissions are most welcome. Upon receipt of manuscripts, the authors will be notified as soon as possible by the Editor.

Submission guidelines:

1. Submit your manuscript electronically to Dr. Patricia Davis-Wiley, Editor, *The TFLTA Journal*, at: pdwiley@utk.edu.
2. Put *TFLTA Journal article submission* in the subject line of your email and include your name, title, school/office affiliation, email address, contact phones numbers and work ing title of the manuscript in the body of the email.
3. Manuscript maximum length (double-spaced) is 20 pages with 1" margins all around.
4. Create a Microsoft WORD document, using Times Roman 12 font; *do not right-justify*.
5. Follow APA '09 (6th edition) format for the manuscript; use APA levels of heading, references, figures and tables; *only articles using APA '09 will be considered*.
6. Include a title page with your name/affiliation *and* a title page *without* this information to expedite the blind review process; do not use running heads; paginate the article.
7. Use [*insert Table X here*] or [*insert Figure Y here*] in the body of the text where tables and figures need to be placed; *insert separate pages* for tables and figures *at the end of paper*, following notes, references and appendices; tables and figures may need to be re-sized for publication; save them as high resolution *jpeg* or *.docx* files.
8. Include a brief (150-word maximum) abstract of the article on a separate page, following the title page; include a 25-word maximum biographic statement for each author on a separate page (at end of the article).
9. Manuscripts are accepted year-round, and authors are encouraged to submit their manuscripts well ahead of the deadline for the Fall 2013/Spring 2014 issue.
10. Send inquires to the Editor of *The TFLTA Journal* at: pdwiley@utk.edu. Put *TFLTA Journal article* in the subject line of your email.

What Did They Learn? Adults Make Sense of a First Semester Spanish Course

Stacey Margarita Johnson
Hope College, Holland, Michigan

Foreign (world) language teaching standards require students to learn more than language. The theory of transformative learning provides a useful framework for exploring adults' profound learning experiences and for evaluating how student learning compares with the national foreign language learning standards. This study investigates learning as reported by adult students in a first-semester, college Spanish class. Purposeful sampling was used to choose a college-level Elementary Spanish I class to study. Student learning journals were collected and analyzed to determine what participants learned other than language. Students who exhibited signs of transformative learning in the learning journals were invited to participate in one-on-one, in-depth interviews. Analysis of the data revealed seven categories of learning reported by students: 1) content, 2) skills, 3) personalized learning, 4) contextualized learning, 5) learning about learning, 6) learning about differences, and 7) learning about connections.

Introduction

As part of the general education requirement for college and university students in the United States, elementary Spanish courses require students to demonstrate content knowledge (such as the vocabulary and grammar) and proficiency with language skills. Typical learning objectives for a first-semester, college Spanish course might include statements about students demonstrating mastery of the present verb tense, thematic vocabulary, the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), and cultural knowledge.

However, often for adult students, learning in a world language course surpasses those course objectives. Studying a second language can be a catalyst for students to engage in critical reflection about language and culture including how language and culture affect the way they interact with the world. The national standards for language learning (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages [ACTFL], n.d.) include both learning that lines up with the typical course objectives as well as deeper learning characterized by critical reflection on the part of the language learner. This critical reflection is often indicative of an important kind of learning conceptualized by Mezirow (1991) as transformative learning. A student who has experienced transformative learning interprets experience in a new way, from a new perspective. While other researchers (Foster, 1997; Goulah, 2006; King 1997, 2000) have explored the relationship between world language learning and transformation theory, in this study, the transformative learning is the framework used to evaluate how student learning experiences compare with the national foreign (world) language learning standards (ACTFL, n.d.).

Background

The Standards

Contemporary standards for language learning require a more comprehensive approach to instruction (ACTFL, n.d.; MLA, 2007), one that is broader and more interdisciplinary than what is typically represented in college course descriptions (Klee, 1998). No longer are students of world languages expected to simply memorize vocabulary and grammar.

In fact, even communicative competence alone fails to meet current standards (ACTFL, n.d.). Language instruction should help students "develop insight into the nature of language and the concept of culture and realize that there are multiple ways of viewing the world" (p. 3) and help "in gaining understanding and in developing their abilities to think critically about how languages work" (p. 6). The Modern Language Association (MLA, 2007) took the position that students should learn "critical language awareness, interpretation and translation, historical and political consciousness, social sensibility, and aesthetic perception" (p. 4). While these are important goals, it is unclear whether adult college students are actually developing such insights through language study, or whether these are simply lofty goals. This study focuses specifically on the experiences of adult college students taking a general education language course in order to discover to what degree students experience the depth and breadth of language study described in the standards.

In the Standards for Foreign Language Learning (ACTFL, n.d.), five concepts are emphasized as the core goals of language instruction: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities.

Communication is at the heart of second language study, whether the communication takes place face-to-face, in writing, or across centuries through the reading of literature. Through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the **cultures** that use that language and, in fact, cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs. Learning languages provides **connections** to additional bodies of knowledge that may be unavailable to the monolingual English speaker. Through **comparisons** and contrasts with the language being studied, students develop insight into the nature of language and the concept of culture and realize that there are multiple ways of viewing the world. Together, these elements enable the student of languages to participate in multilingual **communities** at home and around the world in a variety of contexts and in culturally appropriate ways. (p. 3)

These standards (ACTFL, n.d.) frame world language education as the process of exposing students not only to a new way of speaking, but also to a new way of thinking, acting and of viewing the world. The student must then learn to interact with those that see the world in different ways, be able to draw comparisons across cultures, and embrace differences and equally valid expressions of language and culture. The five principles established by ACTFL encourage

encourage multiple kinds of learning experiences in the language classroom and beyond to facilitate learning.

Thus, with these standards in mind, what do adults students say they are learning? Do students' actual learning outcomes meet the bar set by the five C's?

According to the ACTFL (2011) report "A Decade of Foreign Language Learning," the literature in foreign language education has not adequately documented student achievement in all five standards. Specifically, the category *Communities* has been underrepresented.

Communities has often been termed the 'Lost C,' with the literature expressing the difficulty in teaching toward *Communities* and its consideration as an application task after the basic language is learned, a sentiment also found by other Task Forces in this project. These results support notions of *Communities*, but also of *Comparisons*, as having a lesser impact on the profession than the other three areas.

Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning, a well-established theory of adult learning, provides a useful framework for exploring and explaining what adults learn above and beyond content and skills. Drawing on literature from the fields of adult learning and world language education, this research explored learning experiences reported by students, giving special emphasis learning that connected with the standards (ACTFL, n.d.) and/or represented a fundamental change in the way students thought about and interacted with the world. Aspects of the standards can be difficult to capture in course assessments or even in the research literature. However, by evaluating student learning through the lens of transformative learning theory, a more complete picture of adult world language learning can be drawn.

Learning Categories

In relevant literature regarding adult learning, a dichotomy exists in the kinds of learning that adults experience. Säljö (1979) asked adults what they understood by learning and found that their answers fell into two categories. First, adults responded that learning is the simple acquisition of information or behavior. In a world language class, that would be the equivalent of learning the content and skills. This kind of learning is often the basis of college-level course assessments. Students are specifically tested on their demonstration of learning of content and skills. A second, more complex category of learning that adults described, which Säljö (1979) referred to as real learning or understanding, requires adults to make sense of new information. In this process, adults acquire a new point of view, reorganize beliefs and ideas, or reevaluate assumptions. This reorganization and reevaluation requires adult learners to critically examine their own beliefs, values and behaviors in the light of new information.

In the context of a world language classroom, students learn the content: discrete units of grammar, vocabulary, and cultural information. Students also learn the skills necessary to use the content in linguistic contexts such as conversations or written communications. Mezirow (1991) referred to all of this learning of content and skills as instrumental. The instrumen-

tal learning is generally what is most clearly spelled out in the course description, learning objectives, and assessments. Yet, the standards (ACTFL, n.d.) clearly call for other kinds of learning as well.

Mezirow (1991) described transformative learning (synonymously referred to as transformational learning) as occurring when a student is able to critically reflect on his or her own meaning perspectives, or assumptions about how the world works, and interpret experience from a new perspective. When students go beyond simple memorization and make sense of the content in a foreign language course, they are engaging in higher level learning processes that may lead to personal transformation. Quite different from learning a language, when students experience transformative learning, they are learning a new way to interpret reality, interact with people, and make sense of experience.

The Process of Transformation

Viewing the world through the lens of one's beliefs, assumptions, experiences, and linguistic and cultural norms was referred to by Mezirow (1991) as a *meaning perspective*. It is the tendency of people to see the world from a fixed perspective according to certain expectations, and it is how individuals make sense out of their experiences. Mezirow (1997) also used the term *habit of mind* to refer to meaning perspectives. "An example of a habit of mind is ethnocentrism, the predisposition to regard others outside one's own group as inferior" (p. 6).

The information a student takes in through her senses is filtered through the lens of her meaning perspective. New knowledge that is consistent with her previous expectations is accepted and integrated. New knowledge that is not consistent with her meaning perspective will suffer one of several fates: (a) It may be discarded, dismissed as an aberration or impossibility and filtered out by the lens of her meaning perspective, or (b) the new input may be modified to better fit into the preexisting worldview of the student, interpreted according to the existing meaning perspective, or (c) it may cause a conflict between the previous frame of reference and the new information. If this conflict is explored, it can lead to a transformation of the student's perspective.

Several sociolinguistic elements contribute to the formation of one's meaning perspective including social norms and roles, cultural and language codes, common sense as a cultural system, and ethnocentrism (Mezirow, 1991). All of these elements allow people to live within their native language and culture's structures and readily discard any input from the world that does not fit in their system. The common language of a group of people bonds them into a "dialogic community" (p. 56) that shares meaning through common symbols. Becoming indoctrinated in the codes and assumptions of one's native language and culture is a normal part of childhood and serves to mold young people into productive members of their group. Sometimes referred to as the ideology of a social group, meaning is passed on to younger members of a group through this social indoctrination (Kennedy, 1990).

According to Mezirow (1991), perspective transformation is the hallmark of transformative learning,

Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 167)

The process of perspective transformation is a movement from the disorienting dilemma to critical reflection, then to conscious action, and finally to integration, resulting in a new, broader meaning perspective.

The initial stages of perspective transformation require an individual to recognize a conflict between an experience and his or her own meaning perspective, and then to reflect on and examine that conflict. Mezirow listed signs or indicators that perspective transformation is, in fact, taking place in an individual. These indicators include consulting a wider variety of sources of knowledge, being more critical, seeing the teacher as a guide rather than as an authority that will provide the answers, testing boundaries and assumptions, examining oneself, increased awareness of emotions, physical states, and intuition.

Learning about culture is already conceptualized by researchers as having the potential to be a transformative learning process. Taylor (1994) explored the development of intercultural competency as a form of transformative learning. Supporting cultural awareness and the ability to critically reflect on difference, Chávez, Guido-DiBrito and Mallory (2003) presented a model of individual diversity development that emphasizes critical reflection in order to progress from one level to the next.

Methodology

The Setting and Participants

The case, a first-semester, Elementary Spanish I class at a community college, was selected through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). While conducting research for a previous study (Johnson & Mullins Nelson, 2010), I discovered that a high number of students in one particular instructor's classes were reporting experiences that seemed to be transformative. I began to suspect that the instructor, whom I will call Ms. Salazar (pseudonym), was teaching in a way that promoted transformative learning.

I approached Ms. Salazar about conducting research in her classroom. She agreed to open an Elementary Spanish I classroom to my research and offered extra credit for students who volunteered to participate in the study. I went personally to the class to speak with the students about the research project and their voluntary participation. Thirty students had begun the semester in this Elementary Spanish I class. Of the 22 students still attending the class at the

point I spoke to the class about the research, 21 consented to participate and completed a statement of informed consent. In addition, I obtained consent for the study not only from the instructor and students, but also from the host institution and from the Institutional Review Board at my home university.

Ms. Salazar is a full-time, tenure-track instructor of Spanish at a community college in Tennessee which, for the purposes of this study, will be referred to as Urban Southern Community College or USCC. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), the demographics of the college reflect those of the city it serves (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) with fall 2010 enrollments reporting 62% of the student body African-American and 29% White. With 45% of students in the fall 2009 semester over age 25, the college serves a substantial number of adult, non-traditional students. For the purposes of this study, any student over the age of 18 is considered an adult; however, I hoped that by choosing an institution with significant numbers of adults over age 25, I would have a wider age range of potential participants for the study.

Data Collection

This study had a limited research focus (learning outcomes) and a pre-determined time constraint (one semester), which McKay (2006) described as hallmarks of case study L2 research. Mackey and Gass (2005) described case study research in second language education as focusing on providing detailed descriptions of specific learners or classes. Based on Chaudron's (1988) description of ethnography in second-language classroom research (first recording behaviors and then interpreting them), I concluded that I needed a record of student learning and behaviors. The data needed to be in the students own words in order to enable the interpretation of meaning based on the participants' own understandings, rather than on my perspective as researcher. Rooted in the ethnographic tradition of L2 research, diaries or journals are well-regarded as an important tool for studying language learning (Chaudron, 1988; Nunan, 1992).

I also wanted to understand the classroom environment well enough to understand students' journals. Therefore, I also conducted participant observation in the classroom which consisted of observing class meetings, recording details in my field notes and occasionally audio recording activities. I collaborated with the instructor to choose approximately 10 hours of class time to observe, based on her syllabus and preferences. I was only interested in attending class when instruction was taking place. Each class lasted 90 minutes and I attended six entire class meetings and two partial meetings, leaving early when the students were engaged in silent, individual assessment work. Participant observation required collaboration and relationship-building with the classroom instructor since the decisions she made about how and what to teach directly affected the participants in this study.

Finally, some students exhibited strong indicators of perspective transformation as observed during participant observation or in the learning journals. These students were invited to participate in one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

Learning journals. Student learning journals were used to track student learning through a daily handout of writing prompts that students completed and handed in during the last five minutes of each class period. The instructor was not able to collect learning journals for every day of class. When time did not allow or when the activities were not conducive to taking time out for journaling, the instructor did not collect learning journals for that day. The journals consisted of three to five questions designed to discover what students were learning, how they were learning, how they felt about their learning, and how their learning was affecting other areas of their lives. Learning journals were collected for 15 class meetings on January 27 and 29, February 3, 9, 24 and 26, March 5, 19, 24, 26 and 31, April 2, 4, 7 and 9. Due to inconsistencies in student attendance, the total number of journals collected for any particular student may be fewer than 15. The journal guides for the meetings from January 27 through March 19 contained 4 questions:

1. What did you learn in class today?
2. How did you learn it?
3. Since the last class meeting, did you have any experiences outside of class that related to what we are learning in Spanish class?
4. Is there anything we learned or discussed that caused you to feel excited, shocked, or disturbed? If nothing, then leave this question blank. If so, please explain.

The journal guide for March 24 also included a fifth question, "Is there any topic or content that you wish the instructor would address more in class?" The journal for March 26 included the four questions numbered above plus the fifth question, "Has this class had any impact on your life?" The journal guide for March 31, April 7 and included the fifth question, "Other than grammar and vocabulary, what other things have you learned in class so far?" The learning journal guides for April 2 and 4 included the first two questions listed above, "What did you learn in class today?" and "How did you learn it?" and a third question, "Is there anything we learned or discussed that caused you to have any strong feelings or reactions? If nothing, then leave this question blank. If so, please explain."

Interviews. Based on data collected through participant observation and learning journals, I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) to identify interview participants who seemed to have undergone the initial stages of perspective transformation during the class. As discussed earlier, these outward signs included seeking new sources of knowledge, becoming more critical of their own and others' perspectives, or reporting a disorienting dilemma. Several students showed evidence of seeking out new sources of knowledge by making conscious efforts to meet and get to know native Spanish-speakers in real-world contexts. Other students discussed cultural differences in their learning journals and expressed a desire to learn more. These students were invited to participate in an in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interview (deMarrais, 2004) outside of class. The interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured, conversational interview technique which did not define a script of specific questions for participants, but rather gave multiple categories of information desired and acceptable variations of the questions in each category.

The participant interviews took place in late April 2009 during the last weeks of the semester. All interviews were conducted in the college cafeteria on campus just before or just af-

ter class time, when the cafeteria was not in use.

Data Analysis

I collected and analyzed learning journals for students in the class who agreed to participate in the study. I made two copies of each participating student's journal for the study. The original copy of students' learning journals remained with the classroom instructor. Student responses in the learning journals were coded and categorized (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I read and reread the journals, extracting the information relevant to the research questions. I created indexes of codes on 3x5 cards by writing on the card or by pasting pieces of copies of the learning journals themselves. These 3x5 cards proved very useful in allowing me to manipulate the data, experimenting with categories and themes, in order to make sense of the large amount of student responses I had gathered. The process of coding and categorizing the data began as soon as data began to be collected and was ongoing, continuing throughout the research. As the study progressed, I continued to review literature which added to the analysis process new theoretical considerations and ways of understanding the data.

Researcher's Role in the Study

The process of analyzing my own involvement as researcher required me to be self-aware and reflective. Having collaborated with the classroom instructor to create the questions for the journals, I found that the learning journal questions read like an interview script. Yet, the answers students gave lacked the depth or follow-up of a typical interview. I found myself considering how to interpret student responses in light of the advantages and constraints of the format.

One step I took to avoid ethical issues was to explain to students both orally and in writing that their participation was strictly voluntary, that there was no penalty for non-participation, and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. In addition, I used sporadic member checks to confirm the accuracy of my data with study participants.

An ethical consideration related to my use of email to maintain contact with students became important over the course of the study. Since email is not an entirely secure form of communication, I could not ensure the privacy of our communications (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, & Mattis, 2007). Therefore, I informed each student of this and left it up to them whether to take the risk of using email and to their discretion how much they would reveal during email discussions.

Findings and Analysis

The learning journals created a trail of evidence of student learning spanning the course of the semester. There were two questions that appeared in every journal and provided information about what and how students were learning on a daily basis ("What did you learn in class today?" and "How did you learn it?"). These two questions alone were insufficient to determine whether transformative learning was taking place for two reasons. One, as Säljö (1979) also discovered, most of the learning reported by students was not transformational in nature but related to content and skills. Two, Mezirow's (1991) process of transformative learning unfolds

over a long period of time and students may not be aware of their own transformative learning until they reach the end of the process. Therefore, additional questions were asked to identify if students were having experiences in or out of the classroom that were indicators of the early stages of perspective transformation.

The additional questions served to paint a picture of how students were interacting with the content on deeper levels. For example, one journal question asked, “Since the last class meeting, did you have any experiences outside of class that related to what we are learning in Spanish class?” The journals asked this question several times during the semester to discover if students were finding applications for their learning outside of class or seeking out new sources of information about language and culture. Two questions (“Is there anything we learned or discussed that caused you to feel excited, shocked, or disturbed?” and “Is there anything we learned or discussed that caused you to have any strong feelings or reactions?”) were meant to determine if students experienced negative feelings or disorientation while learning. Some questions asked students for opinions of their learning (“Is there any topic or content that you wish the instructor would address more in class?” Other questions asked, “Other than grammar and vocabulary, what other things have you learned in class so far?”). Still others asked students about the impact of their learning (“Has this class had any impact on your life?”). Student responses to these questions revealed key learning experiences over the course of the semester, documenting events and ideas before students had a chance to forget details.

In an attempt to accurately portray students’ responses, all learning journal quotes appearing in this document are transcribed exactly as the student wrote them. Any abbreviations or deviations from standard spelling and grammar can be assumed to be faithful representations of the students’ handwritten responses.

What Did Students Learn?

I approached the learning journals to discover what students reported learning. The following seven categories emerged.

Content Learning. First and foremost, students noted that they learned discrete units of vocabulary and grammar. For example, one student said, “I learned the months of the year and the seasons”, which are categories of vocabulary words. Another student named a grammatical rule, “Anything ending in ‘z’ will become plural by dropping ‘z’ and adding ‘ces.’” Other responses in this category included: “new verbs and conjugations,” “joining words like *luego*,” and “numbers 40-69.”

This type of learning could also be described as memorizing. In this category of learning, students are simply taking in information in order to reproduce it with no contextualization, personalization, or critical reflection. This kind of learning fits into Säljö’s (1979) description of simple acquisition.

Skills Learning. A second category of answers that emerged from the learning journals also reflects Säljö (1979) of lower level learning, but instead of describing units of information, in this category students described communication skills. Communication skills are the skills

necessary to take the discrete units of grammar and vocabulary and use them together in various contexts to communicate with others. This type of learning requires students to apply content knowledge in practice. Like content learning, this kind of learning requires no critical reflection on the part of the student.

Students gave the following examples of communication skills that they learned:

“I learned how to carefully listen to numbers and translate.”

“I learned how to ask someone’s age!”

“I learned how to conjugate verbs.”

“I learned how to put sentences together about everyday things and actions.”

“To speak more easily in front of people.”

Personalized learning. In a third category of learning reported by students, the content and skills were made even more relevant to each individual’s situation through personalization. In other words, students took the grammar, vocabulary and communication skills and applied them to themselves as a specific case. For example, several students reported learning how to describe themselves using verbs and adjectives. The content and skills taught in that day’s lesson could have been applicable to many instances of describing people, and, in fact, several examples of describing people were given in class. However, the students reported learning the content and skills of describing people in regards to describing themselves specifically. Another student, when describing what she learned from a lesson on dates and times, wrote, “I learned how to say my birthday,” a clear example of personalizing the content. On a day when students used questions learned in class during small-group oral practice, several student mentioned that they learned to say what they liked to do or that they learned about their classmates’ preferences.

Contextualized learning. In other instances, students gave examples of what they had learned that reflected specific contexts or situations which had been used in class activities. For example, in one fun class activity, students filled out a missing persons report using the grammar and vocabulary they were learning related to description. Several students mentioned in the learning journal for that day that they had learned how to fill out a missing persons report. Filling out the missing persons report was obviously not the main point of the lesson, but rather the activity was meant to give a practical application for the grammar and vocabulary being studied. It was remarkable how many times students included these kinds of contextualized activities in their reports of what they learned.

I singled out instances of contextualization and personalization as different categories than content and skills acquisitions. Contextualization and personalization reveal that students are engaging in the important process of internalizing the material and beginning to question their home language and culture, comparing the new information to the existing.

Learning about learning. The fifth kind of learning that students experienced represented a kind of meta-analysis of their own learning. One day, in response to the question “What did you learn in class today?” a student listed some communicative skills and also “That I need to pay attention.” In addition to learning about Spanish, this same student had realized

some of her own weaknesses. On another day, a student wrote, “Nothing really stuck in my head today. I’m in quite a bit of shock from all the things I need to learn. I just wish the speed of the class was slower as far as learning goes.” Many participants used the learning journal to record that they were learning about their weaknesses as students.

In a few cases, students reported that they were enjoying their learning (“I have enjoyed learning, regardless of my difficulties”) or that they were exceeding their own expectations (“I didn’t know I knew that much!”).

Learning about differences. The sixth kind of learning that students experienced was revealed when the differences between the student’s home language and culture were compared and contrasted with the target language and culture. This kind of learning, learning about the differences, is the learning that seemed most likely to lead to the disorienting dilemma described by Mezirow (1991). When students explored differences between vocabulary usage or grammatical structures are explored by students, they revealed increasing metalinguistic awareness. Students also reported learning about cultural differences between the home and target cultures. Discovering contrasts between cultures can be a key event which causes students to critically reflect on their own meaning perspective.

One student summed up her reaction to learning about differences, “Learning how some things differ positively or negatively in our culture vs. the Spanish culture was interesting.” Another student was shocked to learn that descriptive adjectives had different connotations in Spanish than they do in English. The instructor had discussed in class that while *silly* and *hard-working* are seen as positive attributes in English, in Spanish, the terms *tonto* and *trabajador* can have negative connotations. One student wrote in her journal for the day, “hard working is not really a good thing?!” Another wrote that she was shocked “that Latin Americans take being called silly as a bad thing.”

On another day when the instructor pointed out cultural differences in perceptions of time, she explained that Spanish-speakers are more likely to round up or down to the nearest quarter hour and that Americans are more likely to give the exact time. One student wrote in her journal that day, “Time is rounded! Here, if it’s 11:59, it’s 11:59! Wow!”

A student who was also a mother noted, “It’s okay for children in Spanish culture to be aggressive – if bit[ing] each other it’s [is] normal.” As a parent herself, it was interesting to see that she recorded in her journal a significant cultural difference in acceptable child behavior.

After the first month of classes, one heritage speaker was feeling overwhelmed by her learning and wrote in her learning journal that she had been shocked to learn “that I know nothing about the Spanish culture even though my mother is of Spanish heritage.” This statement reveals a potentially disorienting dilemma. In fact, the learning journals were full of examples of contrastive statements by students that could potentially have become disorienting dilemmas.

Learning about connections. In a few cases, students reported learning about similarities between the course content and their own experiences or previous learning. One student of history, especially Hitler and World War II, wrote that he learned “that the Dominican Republic

& Central & Latin America went through whitening!” Given his interests, this adult learner was well aware of whitening in other contexts, but in this class made a new connection to the Spanish-speaking world as a result of a film shown in class. On another day he reiterated this connection writing that he learned, “They were putting people in work camps before Hitler’s time.”

Another student wrote in the final learning journal that, other than grammar and vocabulary, he learned “that our languages are not all that different.”

One student made a strong connection while watching the movie, “I sort of learned a personal lesson about standing up for what I believe in. I know now that people everywhere have suffered greatly.” She connected the suffering she saw in the movie with her own life and also with suffering around the world.

Learning about connections was the smallest category of learning reported. Yet, its importance is highlighted because of the clear connections to the language teaching standards (ACTFL, n.d.) and to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). In transformative learning, students must connect what they learn with their own ways of thinking and doing.

Summary of what students learned. Most of the learning reported on the student learning journals fell into the first two categories, content and skills learning. Based on Mezirow’s (1991) description of the stages of perspective transformation and its indicators, these two categories are the least likely to indicate transformative learning was taking place. Contextualized and personalized learning are indicative of a deeper learning of content and skills. Yet, without further information, these two categories also seemed to be commonly occurring learning experiences with little indication that they were indicative of a deeper shift in students’ perspectives. However, students who reported learning about differences or connections between two languages and cultures may have been experiencing that clash of meaning perspectives required to have a disorienting dilemma. In addition, students who expressed negative emotions or metalinguistic epiphanies while describing learning about learning may have been working through the critical self-assessment stage described by Mezirow.

Did Perspective Transformation Occur?

In addition to identifying what kinds of learning experiences students were having, the learning journals provided other kinds of evidence that students may have been in the early stages of perspective transformation. The stages of perspective transformation I expected would be most likely to occur in the short span of a one-semester class were 1) A disorienting dilemma; 2) Self-examination associated with negative emotions; and 3) Critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions (Mezirow, 1991). Due to the nature of the course, a language course where cultural differences and historical issues were often discussed, and the assumption that language classrooms are fertile ground for perspective transformation, I expected that at least some students would experience one of more of these stages during the semester.

Mezirow detailed indicators that perspective transformation may be taking place. I was particularly vigilant for signs that students may have been exploring new sources of knowledge,

becoming more self-directed, engaging in critical assessment of their own values and traditions, or experiencing strong emotions as a result of their learning.

Exploring New Sources of Knowledge

One of the questions that appeared in every learning journal for the first three months of the semester was, “Since the last class meeting, did you have any experiences outside of class that related to what we are learning in Spanish class?” Many students used this space to detail chance encounters they had with native Spanish speakers. Several mentioned that they were able to understand Spanish conversations they overheard, which was exciting for them. The most interesting entries for this question, however, explained how students had gone out of their way to seek out encounters with Spanish-speaking people. I extrapolated from these encounters that students were both seeking out new sources of knowledge and becoming more self-directed in their learning.

One young lady had consistently written simply, “No” in answer to this question in her learning journals. Then, about a month into the course, she responded, “Yes, I bought some pastries at the *panaria* [*sic*].” The misspelling of the word *panadería* for bakery indicates that her content learning still has room for improvement. However, this report indicated an attempt to explore real-world sources of knowledge. Two weeks later, she reported reaching out to her Spanish-speaking grandmother about the current content, “I spoke with my grandmother a little about cooking.” After this, her entries became longer and more informative.

Another student made frequent contact with native speakers during the semester. In nearly every learning journal, she reported taking initiative to make contact with a native speaker. “YES. I tried to have a conversation with my friend in Spanish, asking her name, where she’s from, and how old she is.” Notably, this particular student traveled abroad during her spring break and later wrote in her learning journal, “YES, I’ve traveled to Costa Rica & the numbers helps with prices.”

One adult learner mentioned opportunities that arose through his work in a restaurant. Most these situations occurred without him seeking them out, for example, while waiting on customers from Spain or dealing with kitchen staff from Mexico. However, the student did demonstrate a desire to initiate contact with these individuals with descriptions of how he used Spanish when he could have used English. “Yes. Last Sunday I had Spanish (yes from Spain) customers. I had a small ‘conversation’ with them and especially with their 3 year old.” He began conducting his normal activities in a new language of his own accord. Early in the semester, he reported that his next-door neighbors were Mexican. Within a few weeks, he had begun speaking to them in Spanish. “I finally spoke, still very little, with my Mexican neighbors who told me I was good but need practice.”

There was an important distinction in the types of contact students reported. Many students (who may or may not have exhibited other signs of transformative learning) reported overhearing native speakers or accidentally making contact with the target culture. For example, one student wrote she “was driving down the street and saw the sign for *Abuelos*, a Mexican restaurant in the area and also a vocabulary word from the textbook. While interesting to note that the student could understand vocabulary words in new contexts, these types of chance

encounters reveal nothing about whether students are actively seeking out new sources of knowledge. However, some participants clearly made the effort to initiate contact with the target language and culture outside of the classroom, clearly making progress in the “Communities” goal of the Foreign Language Standards (ACTFL, n.d.).

One student, answered simply “No” for the first month of class when asked if he had any outside contact with Spanish speakers. Then, suddenly, he began giving an example in nearly every journal entry of making meaningful contact with the target culture. While it is unclear exactly why he experienced such a sudden interest in the Spanish-speaking community, his learning journals seem to indicate that as he discovered more connections between his own African-American heritage and Caribbean history, the student made more attempts at real-world contact with Spanish-speaking people.

Mezirow (1991) described one of the indicators of perspective transformation as “Seeking assistance from a wider variety of sources of knowledge” (p. 193). In the context of a Spanish language class, I interpret this statement to mean that, instead of relying on professors and books, language students undergoing perspective transformation will begin to seek out opportunities to have contact with a wider network of authorities on Spanish language and culture, including the native speakers themselves. In addition, becoming more self-directed in their learning would mean a greater frequency of learning experiences outside of the classroom initiated by the student. Therefore, I conclude that students may have been experiencing perspective transformation if they reported repeated or growing efforts to seek contact with the target language and culture.

Becoming more self-directed. In addition to pursuing contact with native speakers, some students displayed other signs that they were becoming more self-directed learners. A student wrote, “I was intrigued by the movie and looked it up.” This action was recommended by the instructor during instruction and in assignments related to the movie. It is interesting to note that only one student reported taking these steps, reporting them as a response to her own desire to know more.

Critical self-assessment. This category of responses was more difficult to identify with certainty. As I read through the journals, there were occasions when I suspected that students were being critical of their own language, culture, educational system, or traditions. Generally, I felt unable to state definitively that critical assessment was taking place. However, I did identify examples of responses that I believe could be indicative of critical self-assessment.

One student wrote “I found out that *cinco de mayo* was the day that the US was defeated. I find this odd because in ALL the books that I’ve read, I never heard that before.” One of the reasons she has never heard that before may be that it is not an entirely accurate representation of the holiday. I did not observe the class on the day of this lesson, so my own understanding of the lesson is based entirely on student reports. However, regardless of the factual basis, as I read this statement over and over, I was struck by the implied criticism of her own level of education or perhaps of the books to which she has access. I do not believe this young woman questioned the validity of what was taught in her Spanish course, since she phrased the US defeat in Mexico as fact, not as her instructor’s opinion or as the student’s inference, but as

a reality. Then, what does she find odd? Is this student saying that her education is lacking? Or is she saying that the books available to her, which apparently are many, have not provided her with all of the information? Is it a criticism of the educational system in which she has been raised? Or of her own lack of exploration? In any case, this sort of self-assessment could be an indicator of the early stages of perspective transformation.

One student wrote that she had learned that “a latino will have a more negative attitude + will be real honest vs an American.” While the term “negative attitude” has a negative connotation, being “honest” is hard to interpret as negative. Is this student saying that Spanish-speakers are more likely to describe things the way they really are? She is clearly suggesting that English-speakers are not as honest as Spanish-speakers.

One adult learner seemed to have an epiphany about her own language use because of what she learned in class. She realized “I always say I’m doing good even when I’m feel bad.” She evaluated how she presented herself in light of learning about how Spanish-speakers present themselves.

Strong emotional responses. One of the stages of perspective transformation according to Mezirow (1991) is a critical self-assessment accompanied by strong negative emotions. In addition, an indicator of the process may be a heightened awareness of emotions. Some students discussed emotional responses to aspects of the class.

One student, whose mother was of Latin descent and spoke Spanish, had never learned the language well and felt disconnected from the culture. She made several comments about her disconnect. In answer to a question about whether she felt excited, shocked, or disturbed by anything in class, she wrote, “That I know nothing about the Spanish culture even though my mother is of Spanish heritage.” This same journal response was used earlier to describe her reaction to the cultural lessons she heard in class. It seems that she had a negative emotional reaction to the frequent inclusion of culture because she was disturbed by her lack of knowledge about a culture in which she had perceived membership.

Some displays of emotion in the learning journals were related to the classroom practices themselves instead of to the content. One student, who was taciturn in class activities, tended to answer every question in the learning journals by writing just one or two words or leaving the question blank altogether. One day, in response to the question, “How did you learn it?” he wrote, “by doing yet another worksheet.” I interpreted this answer as a display of negative emotion, perhaps frustration, at the instructional techniques themselves.

One student expressed excitement at the beginning of the semester, “I’m excited to learn as much Spanish as I can so I can talk to my grandma + my friend in Spanish.” Despite his initial enthusiasm, by the mid-term, he had stopped attending. Some student’s enthusiasm for the course progressed along a different trajectory. Another participant, who was openly critical of the course throughout, by the end of the semester listed in his learning journal that in addition to vocabulary and grammar, he had learned that “Spanish ain’t so bad.” While this may not seem like a strong display of emotion, in comparison with his other comments it stands out as expressing a completely different sentiment than the majority of his comments.

Conclusion

This research describes the learning experiences of students in a first-semester Spanish course at a community college. While much of the learning reported was content and skills, students also reported learning about differences, about connectedness, and about learning itself. Several participants in this study reached out across social barriers to connect with a new community. All of these examples of learning fit well into the foreign language standards concept of 5 C's (ACTFL, 2011), especially connections, comparisons, and communities. While college course descriptions, syllabi, assessments, and even the research literature may be more focused on the goals of communication and cultures, transformative learning theory provides instructors and researchers a tool for understanding the significant learning that students are experiencing as a result of world language courses.

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Do L2 Spanish Learners Attend to Verb Morphology?

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This paper reports the results of a pilot study about how adult second language (L2) learners of Spanish identify the subject/agent of embedded clauses when those subjects are non-overt/null subject pronouns. The research design presented a series of sentences with embedded clauses in which the subject of the matrix differed from the referent of a null subject pronoun in the embedded clause to beginning learners of Spanish (e.g., Roberto dice que hablas bien el español). Second-semester adult L2 learners of Spanish read a series of this type of sentence in Spanish and then were asked a question about who did the action described in the embedded clause. If the learners attended to the verb morphology in the embedded clause, they would identify the null subject referent as distinct from the subject of the matrix clause. If, on the other hand, they did not, the learners would report the subject of the matrix clause as the null subject referent in the embedded clause. The study's findings revealed that second semester adult L2 learners of Spanish tend to identify the subject of the main clause as the subject of the subordinate clause and, thus do not attend to verb morphology, supporting previous research.

Introduction

In the course of the last 30 years, considerable second language acquisition research has addressed questions related to how second language (L2) learners process input for meaning, how the L2 learners develop a mental grammar of their new language based on that input and the types of instruction that may affect that development (see, for example, Cadierno, 1995; Collentine, 1998; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten & Oikennon, 1996; VanPatten & Sanz, 1995; Wong, 2004). A primary tenet upon which these studies have been predicated has come to be known as the First Noun Principle (FNP) according to which L2 learners assign agent status to the first noun or pronoun they encounter in a sentence (LoCoco, 1987; VanPatten 1984, 1990, 1996 and 2003). The current paper reports a pilot study addressing the question of whether L2 learners of Spanish rely on the FNP to identify the agents in embedded clauses when the subject of those clauses is a null subject pronoun whose referent differs from the subject of the main clause. The paper is divided as follows: a) an overview of sentence parsing, the First Noun Principle and null subject pronouns in Spanish, b) a description of the study, c) the results of the study and discussion and conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Background and Motivation for the Present Study

Sentence Parsing and the FNP

A principal question of interest in research that addresses sentence processing is how do speakers/listeners create a mental representation of syntactic structure to understand a sentence (Fodor, 1998; Townsend & Bever, 2001). At a seminal moment of parsing studies, Frazier and Fodor (1978) proposed the Garden Path model of sentence processing. According to this

model, when speakers/listeners encounter structural ambiguities in a sentence, the ambiguous element in the sentence prompts the learners' parser to reanalyze the sentence in order to comprehend the sentence. This forced reanalysis is said to take place at the syntax/semantic interface. For example, upon reading a sentence like *The horse raced past the barn fell*, the readers'/listeners' default processing strategy initially identifies the word *raced* as the verb in the sentence. Arriving at the final word – *fell* – in the sentence, however, the readers/listeners are forced to reanalyze the incorrect syntactic structure assigned to the element, at first assumed to be the verb, and, thus, modify their original interpretation of the sentence. Sentence processing research has revealed that as speakers/readers process sentences for overall meaning, they also parse the same sentences for the syntactic relations of which they are composed. Any confusion resulting from either type of sentence processing may bring about a reanalysis of the other, as was shown above in the example sentence.

Within the L2 sentence processing research literature, one of the primary findings has been the First Noun Principle (FNP) (VanPatten, 1984). According to this principle, beginning L2 learners of Spanish rely on word order when parsing sentences in L2 Spanish. Doing so leads the learners to mistakenly assign sentence initial direct object pronouns as sentential subjects. Testing this principle, VanPatten presented a series of sentences with sentence initial direct object pronouns (e.g., *Lo mira María* – María watches him, *La saluda el chico* – The boy waves to her) to adult L2 learners of Spanish. The learners consistently assigned agent/subject status to the initial pronoun in the sentence, misinterpreting them to mean, for example, *He watches María* and *She waves to the boy*, respectively. These findings led to the proposal of the First Noun Principle, a psycholinguistic principle according to which L2 learners favor assigning agent status to the first (pro)-noun they encounter in a string/sentence (VanPatten, 1996, 2003).

Comparisons of languages such as English and Spanish have revealed that they differ with regard to whether or not they require overt subject pronouns or not. Consider the following sentences: *Yo hablo español. Hablo español. I speak Spanish. *speak Spanish.*

Comparing first and second sentences above, it is clear that Spanish allows sentences with either overt subject pronouns (*Yo*) or non-overt subject pronouns (*Hablo español*). The third and fourth sentences in English illustrate that while the parallel sentence with an overt subject pronoun is acceptable (i.e., *I speak Spanish*), such is not the case with the fourth sentence (**speak Spanish*). The referent of the non-overt pronoun in the second sentence, also referred to as a *null* subject, is identified by the grammatical morphology of the verb (i.e., the final –o in this example).

Research in both first and second language acquisition has examined questions related to null subject pronouns in the process of language acquisition (Al-Kasey & Pérez-Leroux, 1998; Carminati, 2002; Davies, 1996; Hilles, 1986; Hyams, 1989; Isabelli, 2004; Jaeggli & Safir, 1989; Licerias, 1989; Licerias & Díaz, 1999; Phinney, 1987; Rothman & Iverson, 2007; White, 1985, 1989). Questions arise not only about how L2 learners of Spanish process overt pronouns, such as the sentence-initial direct object pronouns discussed earlier, but in the case of languages such as Spanish or Italian, do beginning L2 learners of Spanish attend to verbal mor-

phology to identify null subject referents or do they rely on some other referent in the sentence and, thus, misinterpret the sentence?

The Current Study

The existence of null subjects in Spanish provides a context within which we may put to the test whether or not beginning L2 learners of Spanish attend to verbal morphology in embedded clauses. Consider the following sentence pair, as an example:

Frank says that I speak Spanish.
Franco dice que ___ hablo español.

In each of these sentences there are two sentences or clauses (*Frank says... and I speak Spanish*). In the case of the English sentence, there must be an overt subject to indicate the change of subject in the second clause. In the case of the Spanish sentence, however, there does not need to be an overt subject pronoun – the form of the verb in the second clause indicates who speaks Spanish. The critical question addressed in this study is this: when confronted with this kind of sentence how does someone answer the question “Who speaks Spanish?” If learners rely upon the FNP to address that question then the answer will be “Franco.” If, on the other hand, the learners rely on the verbal morphology in the embedded clause, then the answer will be “yo”. In comparison to previous research in which questions related to the FNP have incorporated sentences of one clause, the present study addresses the question of what happens when learners are presented with bi-clausal sentences. Do they rely on verbal morphology in the embedded clause to interpret the sentence or do they rely on the FNP?

Stimuli and Materials

Ten sentences with null subjects in embedded clauses whose referents differed from the subject in the matrix clause (see Appendix A) were generated for the study (e.g., *Roberto dice que estudias en la biblioteca*). Vocabulary in the sentences was controlled for using words that are customarily found in standard first semester college-level Spanish courses. The null subject referent in the embedded clause of the critical items differed from the subject of the principle clause. This fact was reflected in the respective verbal morphology (e.g., *Franco dice que hablas bien el español*/ Franco says that you speak Spanish well).

The sentences were then entered on a series of Powerpoint slides. Each slide had a two-clause sentence in Spanish and was followed immediately by a slide with a question in English about the sentence that preceded it. For each of the critical items, the question asked who carries out the action of the verb of the embedded clause (e.g., Who speaks Spanish well?) There were 10 examples of this type of sentence/question pair mixed with 20 distracter sentences.

Participants

The adult L2 participants in this study ($n = 33$) were drawn from three separate second

semester Spanish classes. All participants completed a background questionnaire and the responses were used to determine that all participants were not native speakers of Spanish. Data were gathered during the participants' regular Spanish class session time. The L2 participants ranged in age from 18-30.

For means of comparison, data were also gathered from a sample of L1 heritage speakers of Spanish ($n = 21$) all of whom were graduate students enrolled in an M.A. program at a university in Houston, TX. Information gathered from a background questionnaire revealed that Spanish was their first language, spoken in the home as youths and by their immediate families. The heritages speakers of Spanish participants ranged in age from 18 – 50.

Procedure

All participants completed a background questionnaire with standard questions about family and academic language experience. The participants were then shown two sample slides, one with a sentence in Spanish (e.g., *Ricardo dice que Juan siempre gana.*/Ricardo says that Juan always wins.) followed immediately with a follow-up question in English (e.g., Who wins?) the answer of which was contained in the prior sentences as an activity practice. Any questions about the process were addressed and then data collection began. Each slide, both stimulus slide and related follow-up question slide, was presented for a period of eight seconds. Study participants wrote their responses to each question slides on a numbered answer sheet provided to them before the activity began.

Scoring and Analyses

Responses to the follow-up questions about each target sentence in participants' data reports were coded with either A, if the first noun was identified as the agent of the embedded clause, or B if the referent of the verbal form in the embedded clause was identified as the agent of the embedded clause. An example is shown below:

Franco dice que hablo español
Who speaks Spanish?
Franco = A yo = B

After coding each response, the total number of each cue type on each data report was totaled. As there were 10 target items, there were a total of 10 possible points per data report. In other words, if a participant relied upon word order entirely for subject/agent identification for all ten sentences, the total score would be A = 10 and B = 0. If, on the other hand, the participant relied upon verb form in the embedded clause for subject/agent identification, the total score would A = 0 and B = 10.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistical results of the study. The initial results revealed that the L2 learners of Spanish identified the first noun of the main clause as the agent/

subject of the embedded clause in more than half of the target items ($M = 5.97$). The Spanish native, however, identified the first noun of the sentence as the agent/subject of the embedded clause less often ($M = 2.62$). Turning to the verb morphology of the embedded clause, the results revealed that the L2 learners of Spanish relied on verbal inflections to identify the agent of the embedded clause in approximately 20% of the sentences ($M = 1.10$). The native speakers of Spanish, on the other hand, relied on the verbal morphology of the embedded clause to identify the agent of the clause more than two times more often (mean = 4.24).

Table 1
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Native Speakers' and L2 Learners' Interpretation of Embedded Subjects

	Use of FNP		Use of Verbal Inflection	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
L1 Speakers (n=21)	2.62	1.63	4.24	3.13
L2 Learners (n=33)	5.97	2.04	1.10	1.38

Discussion and Recommendations

Addressing the study's primary research question, these results reveal that adult L2 learners of Spanish do not attend to verbal morphology to identify null subject/agent referents. As we have already seen, not attending to that verbal information results in an inaccurate interpretation of sentences of this type by these learners. These findings are congruent with those in previous research. In one of the seminal studies in Spanish L2 processing research, VanPatten (1984) found that L1 speakers of English learning Spanish as their second language relied on the FNP when processing single clause sentences with fronted direct object clitic pronouns (e.g., *Lo come María*). When processing mono-clausal sentences of that type, the Spanish L2 learners tended to process the sentence-initial pronoun as the subject (He) instead of as the object (him) of the sentence. The results of the present study reveal that L2 learners not only rely on the FNP when processing monoclausal sentences, as has been shown repeatedly by VanPatten and other researchers, but also when processing sentences with embedded clauses.

The results of this study support similar findings regarding the ways in which non-advanced L2 learners of Spanish do (not) attend to verb morphology. VanPatten, Keating and Leiser (2012) presented mono-clausal sentences to third-year university-level L2 learners of Spanish in a self-paced reading study. Study participants read a series of sentences in which fifty percent of the sentences included accurate person-number agreement (e.g., *Ahora Pedro toma el refresco en el salón/Now Pedro drinks the soft drink in the living room*) and 50% of the

sentences included a person-number mismatch (e.g., **Ahora Pedro tomo el refresco en el salon/* Now Pedro I-drink the soft drink in the living room). As in all self-paced reading study design, the participants advanced through the reading of the study stimuli at their own pace as they read for comprehension. The underlying rationale for this research design is that if participants attend to a specific ungrammatical item, they will advance at a significantly slower rate from the frame following the ungrammatical item when compared to the rate at which they advance following a parallel grammatical structure (Frenck-Mestre, 2005). VanPatten and other researchers discovered that while native speakers of Spanish consistently showed a sensitivity to violations involving person-number agreement, university-level third year students of Spanish did not exhibit such a sensitivity or, in other words, they did not attend to verbal morphology inconsistencies. Similarly, such is/was the case with the participants in the present study.

A number of questions arose from the results of this pilot study about participant response patterns and research design. Regarding the patterns of participant response, although the findings revealed that the L2 participants relied on the FNP more often than verbal morphology in the embedded clause to identify the null subject referents, one would anticipate that the L1 speakers of Spanish would rely more heavily on verbal morphology for null subject identification. The explanation of this pattern may lie in a number of possible sources. One potential source may be a potential ambiguity that arose in the way follow-up questions were asked; that is, following a slide with *Roberto dice que estudias en la biblioteca*, the question “*¿Quién estudia en la biblioteca?!* Who studies in the library?” could provoke an accurate response of either *tú* (you) or *yo* (I). As was stated earlier, this study was a pilot study and subsequent data collection will include a redesign of this question prompt to prevent such ambiguity.

An additional and related question that was raised following a presentation of this study and these data at the 2010 Second Language Research Forum (SLRF) was an inquiry about the nature of the L1 participants. Although initially assumed to be representative of L1 speakers of Spanish – reflected by the responses on the initial Background Questionnaire – these participants could also be categorized as heritage speakers of Spanish; that is bilingual.

Future research should replicate this study addressing these issues. It will also explore questions related to how L2 learners process verbal morphology, if at all. Cross-sectional comparisons of data from L2 learner at different levels (e.g., first-year, second-year, third-year, etc.) will provide insight about whether learners ever approximate the types of judgments made by native speakers. In addition, what would performance with biclausal sentences look like with on-line procedures? Is there a correlation between the development of inflectional morphology and the ability to process sentences more like native speakers? How can this be measured? Additional research should address these questions.

This paper has reported on the results of a study designed to address questions of sentence processing by second language learners of Spanish who share English as a common first language. The findings of the present study support previous work (VanPatten, 1984) indicating a predilection to rely on the first noun strategy in questions of agent identification. Prior research revealed a reliance on that strategy in tasks of referent identification of direct object pro-

nominals (VanPatten 1984). The results of the present study revealed that second language learners of Spanish rely on that same strategy when asked to identify null subject referents in embedded clauses.

Pedagogical Implications

The results of the current study reveal that beginning learners (second semester) of Spanish are not attending to verbal morphology when reading sentences in spite of the fact that this information is a primary component in second language classrooms. While one would not advocate not teaching verbal grammar at all – a suggestion that would be tantamount to throwing the baby out with the bathwater – these findings provide a point of comparison for language instructors of Spanish as an L2 in general. The findings suggest that Spanish instructors may do well to draw their students' attention to the *meaning* of the verbal grammatical morphology, highlighting that, in comparison to English, that is the sole source of information about subject referents. Even so, the results of the current study taken in conjunction with findings from studies such as VanPatten, Keating and Keating (2012) reveal that developing a mental system of this type of grammatical information is a process that requires a very extended exposure either as measured by time and/or intensity.

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Appendix A

Target Items

*Tú sabes que hablo con Marta todos los días.
Los atletas creen que corre demasiado
Los psicólogos dicen que comprendo el problema.
Francisco dice que no vienes a las fiestas.
El científico dice que no comprenden los experimentos.
El médico explica que debo comprar más máquinas para el hospital.
Los periodistas reportan que no gana el partido.
Yo sé que llamas todos los días.
El psicólogo dice que entiendo muy bien.
Marta sabe que entiendo con un libro.*



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The Simple Past and Present Perfect in Peninsular Spanish As Seen in *Mensaka*

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*One task of great importance for students of Spanish is learning to conjugate verbs in all of the tenses as well as distinguishing between, say, the preterite and the imperfect. Teaching the differences between the preterite and the imperfect reserves considerable space for the curriculum of Spanish courses-but what about the differences between the preterite and the present perfect? The usage of the preterite and present perfect in the Spanish language is not at all consistent for Peninsular Spanish versus Latin American Spanish. Students studying Spanish are possibly unaware of these inconsistencies regarding past tenses in Spanish across the numerous dialects of the Spanish language. The reason for these inconsistencies between the preterite and present perfect in Latin America versus Spain is not clear. This study, therefore, will illustrate the different ways the present perfect is used in Spain, in particular Madrid, while at the same time shed light on how present perfect assumes perfective functions in Peninsular Spanish using the novel *Mensaka* by José Ángel as a point of reference.*

Introduction

Most language instructors would agree that teaching the differences between the preterite and the imperfect, or attempting to distinguish between the subjunctive and the indicative, can be a cumbersome task. Spanish textbooks ranging from beginning to advanced levels reserve considerable space for these grammar points. Another verb tense introduced in elementary Spanish textbooks is the present perfect. Most Spanish textbooks explain the present perfect, as in the case with my current textbook, “The present perfect indicative generally is used just as in English: to talk about what someone has done or what has occurred. It usually refers to the recent past” (Blanco & Doney, 2012, p. 518). According to this explanation, the Spanish present perfect in many respects mirrors the English present perfect. Textbooks fail to mention the present perfect is used less frequently in Latin American Spanish and is reserved for situations where it would be required in English, but this is not the case in peninsular Spanish (Moreland, 379). Charles Kany asserts that “in Madrid, for instance, the present perfect is preferred to the preterite and is often used in cases where only the preterite was previously considered legitimate...such usage is rare in American Spanish. The simple preterite, on the contrary, is frequently used in most of Spanish America in cases where a purist insists on the present perfect” (Kany, 1951, p. 161). Studies have generally confirmed Kany’s observations but not until recently have linguists sought to expound on the different usage of the present perfect (Westmoreland, 1988). In order to understand the present perfect more fully, it is necessary to take a brief look at the origin of the verb.

Background of the Study

In Vulgar Latin, the present perfect was formed by combining auxiliary verb *habere* [to have] in the present tense with past participle to express the result of a past action that continued into the present (Harris, 1982). The present perfect has not changed a great deal regarding its formation. In Spanish it is formed with combining the present tense of helping verb *haber* [to have] with a past participle. In modern-day Spanish the perfect tense, other wise known as anterior, is generally considered to represent a past action with current relevance, or an action which initiated in the past and continues into the present. Demonstrated with the verb, *mirar*, *he mirado la tele hoy* [I have watched TV today], although it is completed action in the past the sentence carries with it current relevance. On the other hand, a simple past tense or perfective verb form views a situation as having temporal boundaries with no relevance to the current moment: *miré una película la semana pasada* [I watched a movie last week]. However, one common trend amongst some world languages is when an anterior takes on perfective functions. Some linguists refer to this process as *semantic generalization*, *bleaching*, or *erosion* (Schwenter, 1994). That is, the perfect is beginning to invade the semantic domains of a perfective (preterite/simple past tense). Some romance languages already are or have been undergoing this grammaticalization of this form from anterior to perfective function. Two noteworthy examples are French and Italian; both languages in the spoken form use the present perfect for all perfective functions. The simple past has been completely lost from spoken French and is only reserved for formal writing. Dalh (1984) gives detailed evidence of this change as it spread through French has been chronicled, and we now know that 17th century French distinguished between past events occurring *today* (Present Perfect) and those occurring *before today* [(Preterite). Currently in the French language, this distinguishing between events is no longer required where the present perfect is used for both *today* and *before today* events. The present perfect, in Spanish, according to a number of scholars, is undergoing a similar process of change as French (Alonso & Henríquez Ureña, 1951). The usage of the present perfect (*passé composé*) assuming perfective functions in 17th century French can easily be compared to Spanish, such as dialects of Peninsular Spanish as well as certain varieties of South American Spanish.

Purpose of the study

Scholars have confirmed the preterite is now being replaced by the present perfect for certain completed actions in the past in many dialects of Peninsular Spanish, and as mentioned earlier, a few South American dialects of Spanish. For Spanish Students of Spanish—in particular, the ones who study Spanish in Spain—may find themselves wondering why there is a *misuse* of the present perfect in Peninsular Spanish. It is evident that the usage of the preterite and present perfect is not at all consistent for Peninsular Spanish versus Latin American Spanish. One may be seated in a café in Mexico and hear, *Esta mañana lei un libro*, while in Spain, hear, *Esta mañana he leído un libro* for, *This morning I read a book*. Comparing peninsular Spanish to English it is understood that “European Spanish usually uses the perfect wherever English does, but the converse is not true: the perfect is often used in Spain where English requires a simple past tense.” (Butts & Benjamin, 1996, p. 223). Furthermore, in the majority of the Spanish-speaking world, the preterite is much more common than the present perfect. The reason for these inconsistencies between the preterite and present perfect in Latin America versus Spain is

not clear. There exist wide discrepancies between the uses of the present perfect in Latin American and Castilian varieties of Spanish. To have a better understanding in English, one could say “did you do it” (preterite) rather than “have you done it?” (present perfect). Needless to say, a language learner should be privy of when it is necessary to use the present perfect versus preterite in Peninsular Spanish by a simple rule: the present perfect is usually used for *today* past events, while the preterite is usually employed for before *today* past events (Schwenter, 1994). “This type of remoteness distinction, in which grammatical categories are used to mark how far a situation is from the moment of speech, has been termed the hodiernal/prehodiernal distinction (from Latin *hodie* [today])” (Dahl 1984, 1985). Other linguistics coin it the *24 hour Rule* (Carter, 2002). The hodiernal/prehodiernal distinctions as well as other present perfect usages will be addressed in this study. This leads me to the purpose of the present paper, which is to illustrate the different ways the present perfect is used in Spain, in particular Madrid, while at the same time shed light on how present perfect assumes perfective functions in Peninsular Spanish using the José Ángel novel *Mensaka* by José Ángel as a point of reference. Other than using the hodiernal/prehodiernal distinction to determine when to use the present perfect in Peninsular Spanish, other prevalent usages of the present perfect that will be closely examined for this study are: (1) Noteworthy news: *¡España ha Ganado la Copa de Davis!* [Spain has won the Davis Cup!]; (2) Experiential: *¿Has ido alguna vez a Francia?* [Have you ever been to France?]; (3) Past continuing into the present: *Hemos estado esperando tres horas.* [We have been waiting for three hours] (Schwenter, 1994).

Description of the Novel

The novel selected for this study is *Mensaka* written by José Ángel Mañas and was published in 1995. The Spanish writer, Angel Mañas appeared on the literary scene with *Historias del Kronen* in 1994. Angel Mañas is often considered to be a maverick since his prose reflects spontaneous and casual conversation rather than a more formal, narrative style. He writes his novels through a language that attempts to record everyday dialogue, often contradicting the rules of written language. In many ways, his novels, in particular *Mensaka*, seem more like a play than a novel (Dorca, 1997). Since the novelist does an exemplary job of recording everyday dialogue in Spanish, the present perfect, in particular, as seen in the spoken Spanish will clearly stand out. There is certainly more dependency on dialogue and the oral component than descriptive narrative in his novels (Pao, 2002). Because of the heavy usage of dialogue and the growing popularity of Ángel Mañas, it is of little surprise that two of his novels have been made into movies. The novel, *Menaksa*, is a story of a group of young, aspiring musicians trying to strike it rich, while holding on to their creative ideals and friendships. The setting of *Mensaka* is in the background of Madrid’s sizzling urban rock and roll scene of the early 90s. The main character of the novel is David. David is a *mensaka*, Spanish slang for motorbike messenger, who also plays drums in a band with two friends, Fran and Javier. The band is on the verge of signing a record contract with a shady agent, but tempers flare over their being promoted as young urban poets. David refuses to compromise their rough-edged sound while fellow band member Fran cares less about the music than filling his quota of pretty female groupies behind his girlfriend’s back. In short, the novel can be summed up as a great leap forward into adulthood.

Discussions of the Findings

Due to the length of the novel, this study will examine the treatment of the present perfect in dialogue and not in the narrative. 136 cases of the present perfect were found in the exchanges amongst characters, while only 28 cases of the preterite. The minimal use of the preterite demonstrates preference of peninsular preference of the present perfect in spoken speech, especially the Spaniards from the capital of Spain, Madrid. A number of examples of this verb form occur in many of the same contexts as the present perfect in English, and all of which are commonplace in normal speech. Initially, this study analyzes the usage of the present perfect as the past continuing into the present. In Spanish, you have more than one way of expressing this idea, but in English you have to use the present perfect. As mentioned previously, the present perfect as *the past continuing into the present* or *current relevance* describes an action that began in the past and continues into the present and quite possibly into the future (Carter, 2003). Listed below are examples taken from the novel with English translations. The translations are mine, which hopefully will assist the reader in seeing how the present perfect of *comer* (*he comido*) should not always be translated directly into the English *I have eaten*.

Me he relajado mucho estos años pero lo he vivido y eso no me lo quita nadie (p. 22).
[I have relaxed a great deal over these years, but I have lived them and no one can take away.]

Será porque tú no has parado de hablar (p. 25).
[It may be because you have not stopped talking.]

A mis viejos no les visto desde entonces, pero tampoco me importa demasiado (p. 47).
[I have not seen my parents since then, but not like I care too much.]

Yo qué sé, nos conocemos hace tiempo y siempre me has molado (p. 74).
[I don't know. We have known each other a while and I always liked you.]

Mamá, has vivido en esta ciudad más de cuarenta años (p. 113).
[Mother, you have been living in this city for more than 40 years].

No sé lo que he hecho ni dónde he estado (p. 135).
[I don't know what I've done nor where I've been.]

Llevo un par de días buscándote. ¿Dónde has estado (p. 135)?
[I've been looking for you a few days. Where have you been?]

Te hemos estado llamando toda la tarde, tronco (p. 145).
[We have been calling you all afternoon, dude.]

It is important to remember that the present tense and the present perfect are frequently employed interchangeably in these conditions. Often, the present perfect is preferred for negative phrases while positive phrases take the present tense, although both are acceptable. One

need only to compare, *Hace años que no lo veo*, with, *Hace años que no lo he visto* for *I have not seen him for many years*, to understand this.

Another attribute of the present perfect for all dialects of Spanish is when one speaks of experiences, dubbed as *experiential* (Howe & Schwenter, 2008). When we speak about an experience, we usually are referring to an unspecified time in the past and often employ the adverbs *never* and *ever* in English and the adverbs *nunca* or *alguna vez* in Spanish. What is important is that we did have the experience, and that today we remember the experience. This is the connection between the present and the past. Listed below are two examples of the present perfect, which are *experiential*:

¿Nunca has engañado a Bea (p. 57)?
[You never cheated on Bea?]

¿Te has liado alguna vez con otro (p. 131)?
‘Did you ever cheat on him with someone else?’

¿Dónde has estado todo el día? (p. 146)
[Where have you been all day?]

From the above examples it is clear that the goal of these utterances is not to locate a situation at some definite point in the past, but only to offer it as relevant the current moment (Bybee, 1985).

In addition to using the present perfect for *experiential*, this verb form is readily used for noteworthy accomplishments of individuals and humanity, news headlines or unexpected news. Among the cases in which the present perfect most closely resembles the simple past, in both English and Spanish, is the preference for the present perfect for *Hot News*. The third and fourth examples below, in particular, illustrate the ability of the perfect to make reference to *Hot News* events occurring in a recent past.

¿Se ha muerto alguien (p. 71)?
[Has someone died?]

Esta mañana un taxista ha sido atropellado por un camión en pleno centro de Madrid (p. 126).
[A taxi driver was run over by a delivery truck right in the middle of Madrid.]

Ha habido un terremoto en Tokio (p. 158).
[There has been an earthquake in Tokyo.]

The usage of the present perfect for *hot news* is generally more peninsular. In Latin American Spanish, more dialects tend to employ the preterite for noteworthy events. This

claim is supported by Daniel Burgos who in a survey of Argentine headlines claims that *Hot News* functions are almost exclusively performed by the preterite (Burgos, 2004).

The present perfect is commonly utilized with adverbs of time. Throughout the novel there were various cases of the present perfect co-occurring with *today* adverbials. A few time adverbs in Spanish which correspond to the present are *ya, nunca, siempre, todavía, en toda mi vida, a veces..* Examples of *today* adverbials taken from the novel:

Ya la hemos escuchado (p. 34).
[We already have listened to it.]

Lo he pensado pero, no sé, todavía no lo tengo claro (p. 83).
[I have thought about it, but I don't know, I still don't have it clear.]

Sabes, a veces creo que tú nunca has estado enamorado de mí (p. 97).
[You know, at times I think you never have been in love with me.]

¿Se han ido ya (p.105)?
[They already left?]

Nunca me he metido en tu vida, eso no me lo puedes negar (p. 112).
[I never have meddled in your life; that you can't deny.]

David a tí nunca te ha hecho esto, ¿verdad (p. 131)?
[David hasn't ever done this to you, right?]

These results corroborate the arguments made by Schwenter (1994), who declares that the perfect in Peninsular Spanish is highly favored in *today* past contexts, so much so that it has become the default tense for these situations. In addition, one prevalent characteristic of Peninsular Spanish is the favored use of the present perfect with the adverb *ya* illustrated in the second example listed above (Schwenter, 1994). In the novel only one example of the preterite co-occurs with *today* adverbs. Oddly enough, the person who used the preterite in this context was an older character. Schwenter states that “older speakers are more likely to utilize the preterite for same-day past perfective situations” (Schwenter, 1994, p. 103). Evidently, older generations in Peninsular Spanish are trying to hold on to the preterite while newer generations want to displace the preterite with the present perfect.

The aforementioned sentences are samples of the present perfect with temporal adverbs that are connected to the present. As mentioned earlier, in Peninsular Spanish, the present perfect can be used for a simple past tense for an action that is not at all connected to the present. Aside from being used with time adverbs, there were numerous cases of the present perfect with no reference to a distinctive time frame. In the study of the verb tenses in the novel, strangely the preterite never was employed when there was no designated time period; this occurred often in the novel when characters were asking questions. It can be assumed that the present perfect is performed in this way because there exists the possibility that the interlocutor may have car-

ried out an action on the same day, that is, within a twenty-four-time period supporting the hodiernal/prehodiernal distinction (Schwenter, 2004). It would be argued that most of the examples would use the preterite in Latin American Spanish and the simple past in English. We must keep in mind at times the reader will be able to determine the time frame by the context of the rest of the text. These are merely examples taken from the novel; therefore, this is not a complete representation of the present perfect in every day Spanish in Madrid.

Fran me ha llamado (p. 24).
[Fran called me.]

¿Y qué te ha dicho tu primo (p. 24)?
'And what did your cousin tell you?

¿Y no te ha dicho por qué (p. 25)?
[And he did not tell you why?]

¿Qué has hecho, tronco (p. 41)?
[What did you do, dude?]

¿Qué pasa, he dicho alguna tontería (p. 50)?
[What is going on, did I say something stupid?]

He conocido a una tía (p. 60).
[I met a chick.]

¿Has ido o no has ido (p. 63)?
[Did you go or not]

¿Te has enterado (p. 65)?
'Did you understand?'

Te ha metido una bola (p. 66).
[He told you a lie.]

¿Quién coño ha sido (p. 89)?
[Who the hell was it?]

Ha bajado a por cervezas (p. 107). (This is not a typo; it is not very common for Latin American Spanish.)
[He went down for some beer.]

Ha salido a dar una vuelta (p. 24).
'She went out for a walk.'

Once again, it can be surmised that present perfect is becoming the default tense in Peninsular Spanish in contexts of indeterminate temporal reference. These are contexts in which the temporal location is potentially unidentifiable by the interlocutor (Howe & Schwenter, 2008).

As mentioned previously in this paper, there were many more cases of the present perfect than the preterite in the dialogues throughout the novel. One aspect of the preterite in the novel was that almost every case was accompanied by a time adverb, which refers to *before* today events such as *el sábado, el otro día, ayer*. Undoubtedly, this demonstrates that the hodiernal/prehodiernal distinction is practiced by Spaniards in Madrid. As stated earlier only one example of the preterite in the novel was discovered in a 24-hour time window; however, we must be reminded that it was an utterance of an older character in the novel. Listed below are a few examples of the prehodiernal or *before* today events:

Y el sábado, ¿qué pasó (p. 64)?
[And Saturday, what happened?]

El otro día os vi en la calle (p. 75).
[The other day I saw all of you in the street.]

Si quieres comer, tienes alubias que sobraron de ayer en nevera (p. 98).
[If you want to eat, you can have the beans left over from yesterday, which are in the refrigerator.]

Ayer, por ejemplo. Cogí a uno que salía del casino y que decía que había perdido veinte kilos (p. 126).
[Yesterday, for example, I picked up a guy who was leaving a casino, and he was saying he had lost twenty kilos.]

Conclusion

This paper has addressed the distribution of the present perfect and the preterit as used in the novel, *Mensaka*. As pointed out previously in the paper one can conclude that the present perfect—at least as used in Madrid—in many ways still mirrors Latin American Spanish and English. There were no major distinctions for present perfect as seen in *hot news, experiential* and *past continuing into the present*. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, the major difference between Castilian dialects and Latin American dialects of Spanish for the present perfect is for completed events, which occur within a 24-hour window; in these cases, a simple past tense such as the preterite would be employed in Latin America and the present perfect in Spain. The findings in this study support the conditions proposed by Schwenter (1994). For this reason, the hodiernal/prehodiernal distinction holds true for the Spanish spoken in Madrid. Also, it can be assumed that the present perfect is the preferred tense for past events in Madrid and other regions of Spain at least in conversation. Clearly, the present perfect in peninsular dialects is undergoing a *grammaticalization*. One might wonder why this process occurs in some regions of Spain but not throughout other dialects of the Spanish language. It can be argued that the

most logical answer is that it is sociolinguistic in nature: as in the case with sound change, innovative uses of grammar, which may or may not be accepted by the wider speech community. Thus, this change perhaps originates within a certain social group and is then passed through speaker interaction, if the norms of usage of the particular community permit. As is the case with present perfect in Madrid, these discoveries indicate that the present perfect has already invaded the semantic domain of the preterite. Only time will tell if the present perfect will invade all past perfect situations, as is the case in the French language. As a teacher of Spanish, it is my obligation for my students to understand that present perfect may possibly replace the preterite completely. If so, it is doubtful that the preterite will completely disappear from the Spanish language considering that the French's preterite (*passé simple*) still survives in formal writing. In conclusion, students should be aware that the present perfect is mainly the preferred past tense in Peninsular Spanish for *today* events and the preterite primarily for the *before today* events.

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Green Screening Around the World: Virtual Video Trips in the Spanish Classroom

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Using a green screen is a technique in which the backdrop in a picture is replaced with a new background of one's choice. Although the setup of a green screen appears complicated, once the procedure is mastered, the students can take personalized video trips anywhere in the world and narrate their story in the target language on an individualized level of proficiency. They will be able to place themselves in the pictures and appear to be in any global location of their choice.

Introduction

A large portion of world language teachers would probably agree that taking field trips to locations where the target language is spoken, is a valuable experience. However, even if students were to take such a trip, they could not possibly visit every country where the language is spoken. Using a *green* (or even blue) *screen* technology is the ideal way to virtually transport world language students and their teachers to international venue, and allows them to virtually appear in front of the Eiffel Tower, the Great Wall, or even a Mayan pyramid. The possibilities are literally endless as the students create virtual field trips.

Imagine the excitement of students who take video trips to Spain, where they role-play getting ready for a blind date, meeting at a café to eat *churros y chocolate*, running with the bulls at San Fermín, and visiting their pen pals in Zaragoza. They can also create a cooperative presentation of important target language country holidays, in which students can take turns explaining the history behind, the cultural aspects of, the activities associated with and the significance of these celebrations.

This article describes how the authors placed their students in special virtual environments illustrating special Hispanic events. Once in these global venues, the students were then asked to creatively narrate them in Spanish. The authors were able to individualize the level of linguistic difficulty according to their students' various linguistic skill levels. Using Green Screen technology for this activity has countless benefits to the world language classroom including, but not limited to motivation, cooperation, relationships, and problem-solving. In addition, students are compelled to use active language skills, such as correct grammar and vocabulary as well as proper pronunciation, resulting in cultural appreciation and awareness through the use of technology.

Theoretical Framework

Today's students typically thrive on social interaction with their peers. Creating virtual video trips using current, available technology gives these students an opportunity to work with their peers in small group settings. According to the research, students who work in these groups, are building a new knowledge base from previously-learned material (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003). Technology plays a key role in students' lives and is at the upper end of their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Lev Vygotsky (1978) described the ZPD as being "distance between the actual developmental level. . .and the level of potential development" (p. 86). This potential development is done under the guidance of a teacher or fellow student who has more knowledge about the subject. The fact that there is a paucity of published work on the utilization of green screen technology in the classroom, is one of the compelling reasons that compelled the authors to decided to this article to share with other world language educators in this journal forum.

Chroma Key Software

In order to produce pictures with a *green screen* one will have to purchase a software program that actually replaces the color green on the green screen with a new background. We have been using the inexpensive software called 123Videomagic. There are other similar software programs available on the market, but we have been using this one because it is inexpensive and user-friendly for non-professional photographers. Each program comes with its own set of detailed directions. (Other programs that are available to teachers include GreenScreen-Wizard, LS PhotoPro and FX Home PhotoKey 5.) Using the 123Videomagic software is only one way to achieve the desired effect. Depending on the software used, the process may differ and may have its own proprietary requirements. Even though the procedure for using this technology is fairly basic, the authors have included step-by-step instructions for teachers who are new to this technology

The Process

Since Chroma Key Software is what we use, the instructions for this process are propriety to this particular software package but may be similar to other packages.

1. After taking a picture of the desired object to display on the green screen, upload it on the program.
2. Next, upload the desired background and select *apply background*.
3. Finally, select the *publish* option and the picture will be ready for use.

Sometimes, the end results are not perfect and the students may want to touch up the picture with Paint software. There may be a few green spots, for example, especially around students' hair. This is no problem, however, because one can match the hair color in the Paint program. There may also be some blue streaks where the green screen was wrinkled. But again, one can simply paint over problem areas. In order to minimize problems, the teacher should tell

the students not to wear green or blue green on picture day. (If they wear the same color as the screen they will disappear into the background color and not be easily seen.) It is important to note here that rather than just having a permanent colored green/blue background, it is possible use a moving or video backdrop such as a bull fight, a busy market scenario or even a busy traffic scene from the target language country.

Setting up a Green Screen

When visitors who have heard about the *green screen*, arrive to the classroom, they always want to know where it is, and are disappointed that it is not permanently set-up in some corner of the room. In actuality, a green screen takes up a lot of space, so leaving it permanently set-up is not always practical for a small classroom. (It may need to be stored in a closet when not in use.)

Prior to the initial green scene set-up, some research into green screen techniques revealed that a rather large piece of fabric, the size of a queen sized sheet, needs to be used in order to have enough space for the students to be visible in front of it, and yet still have enough background to be able to tell where they are located. (Whereby the screen can also be blue, most professional photographers prefer green for digital photography.)

If there is space available, teachers may decide to paint a wall and part of the floor green instead of using a portable green screen. Teachers, working alone or collectively with their colleagues, can also purchase green screen lighting sets on the Internet, spending as much or as little as they are willing to invest. Such a set includes the frame for the green screen, the fabric, and three photographic lighting fixtures with bulbs.

Once the set is complete, it is important to note that in order for the software to work, the students should be at least 5 feet away from the background. Two of the lights should illuminate the background on each side of the screen. The third light should brighten the subject to be photographed. The designated photographer needs to be aware of different lighting for different skin complexions. (There are numerous videos available on *youtube.com* to explain the ideal setup.) In the authors' personal experiences, they have found that the best thing to do, though, is to have the students experiment with different ways to set-up the lighting and have them discover for themselves how to best arrange the screen and the lighting. This is a wonderful opportunity to teach students cooperation and problem-solving skills. Students are usually amazed by the results and cannot wait to do another such project, making this process a superb motivator.

Taking Green Screen Pictures

When we first started using the green screen, we used a pocket camera. The students were so excited that this actually worked that we were quite satisfied with the results. However, this year, a good SLR camera was used, making the difference in quality so astounding that a pocket camera will never be used again with this technology.

Once the lighting fixtures are set-up properly, the flash should not be necessary. After

seeing how large the screen is, we resorted to setting it up at the end of the hall, by a staircase, bringing our laptop with us to use there. (It is best not to set it in front of a window because the light will shine through the screen.) For our faculty green screen training sessions, we usually use the school's spacious library. After selecting the background pictures, it is a good idea to have them actually open for the photographer to see as he or she takes the pictures. It is important to consider the exact placement of the subject in the picture. The students should use interesting facial expressions and poses when they act out the scene. It may be necessary to take the same scene over and over until it is satisfactory. Such patience is a great learning opportunity.

Recording the Video

After taking the pictures to be used in the presentation (10 to 15 per video), we usually load them on a PowerPoint and then add narration in Spanish. (It is best to write out the script ahead of time, correct any grammatical errors, and have the students practice their lines with proper pronunciation.) The teacher will have to come to terms with the idea that results will never be perfect, however, this is what learning is all about--discovery and progress.

Students can use the PowerPoint narrating feature or a screen-recording program, such as *screenr.com* or *screencastomatic.com*. Both are free and easy to use. If the students want to create a more elaborate presentation, they can incorporate Google Earth and fly to their location, going back and forth between the PowerPoint and Google Earth as they record. This takes some skill on the part of the students, but it can be done. On a virtual trip to Zaragoza to visit the pen pals, the authors' students flew to Spain, zoomed in on street view, and went back and forth with the PowerPoint as the recording was completed. The final 5-minute video actually took 3 hours to complete but served as a valuable learning experience for all involved.

Sharing the Projects

Students will be very proud of their accomplishments after the virtual trip is recorded and will want to share their finished products with the world by posting them on the teacher's website, *schooltube.com*, or on class management sites such as *Edmodo.com*.

Conclusion

Creating and enjoying amazing virtual trips using a *green screen* takes a little effort on everyone's part, but it can lead to some outstanding results. Students' projects and presentations take learning to an entirely new personalized level, while reinforcing conversational and grammatical skills, as well as encouraging proper pronunciation of the target language and contributing to cultural appreciation and awareness in the world language classroom. Teachers in content areas other than world languages can also use the *green screen* technique with their students, sharing the start-up costs for the software and lighting features. The primary author of this paper has been able to purchase two sets of lighting equipment and five licenses for the *green screen* software, making it available to the math, special education, marketing, the world

language departments and the media center. Helpful websites supporting this technology follow.

Helpful Websites

<http://123videomagic.com>
<http://edmodo.com>
<http://screenr.com>
<http://screencastomatic.com>
http://youtu.be/q3PZO_ICBkw?hd=1
<http://schooltube.com>

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Quality Assurance in EFL Proficiency Assessment in a Tertiary Educational Context

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The study addresses the topic of quality assurance in EFL Proficiency assessment in a tertiary educational context. It examines the reliability and validity of a test which has been designed and implemented as a new tool for assessing the required EFL proficiency level of students in an EFL teacher education program in a teachers' college. It further examines teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes following the implementation of the test in order to provide a clear and transparent evaluation and reporting as well as gain insights into: (i) the perceived quality of the test and the consequences of its implementation (ii) the assessment atmosphere among teachers and students. (iii) the implementation of possible instructional changes in the learning program in order to connect assessment with learning and teaching and address learning needs based on test feedback. The study aims to ground testing practice in reliable and valid test use as well as ethical conduct to ensure quality in assessment by building on-going evaluation into the assessment process. The current report which is the first stage in a longitudinal research process is perceived by the researchers as a means of control employed to indicate ways to promote high standards of quality assurance in the teaching, learning and assessment of EFL proficiency.

Introduction

Several testing developments in language education have been based on the belief that examination reform can act as a "lever for change" (Pearson, 1988, p. 101). There has been evidence in language research that changes in the assessment system have an impact on teaching, learning and those involved (Ferman, 2004). The apparently powerful effect of tests can be turned into an advantage and exert a positive impact on teaching and learning. The use of assessment as a strategy for promoting change has become increasingly widespread (James, 2000).

Background: Innovation in Assessment Quality in Learning

Promoting quality in teaching and learning via innovation in assessment is a complex undertaking. A variety of factors may inhibit or facilitate successful implementation (Andrews, 2004). Wall (2000) asserts that the introduction of innovation in assessment needs to be introduced very carefully by taking into account the characteristics of educational context conditions and the characteristics of those involved (i.e., teachers and learners) in the innovation process. Moreover, the assessment process itself should be examined with regard to its effect on facilitating or inhibiting the intended changes (Wall, 2000, p. 506).

Wall (2000) made a number of recommendations to researchers investigating the impact of innovation in assessment.

- (a) *Analyze the "antecedent" situation to ensure that the change is desirable.*
- (b) *Involve teachers and possibly students in the stages of planning.*
- (c) *Incorporate stakeholder representatives in the design team to ensure that the test is both acceptable and comprehensible to those involved.*
- (d) *Provide draft test specifications for all key stakeholders, and carefully pilot the new test before its introduction.*
- (e) *Build on-going evaluation into the implementation process.*
- (f) *Do not expect an instant impact on instructional practices, or the precise impact anticipated.* (pp. 506-507)

Research Procedure

Research Stages

In the antecedent stage, a meeting of the English department staff was dedicated to a discussion of the EFL proficiency level requirements of the department students. In the course of the standard setting discussion different levels of mastery were discussed. Eventually, it was decided what standards had to be met by the students to show the required mastery of the EFL skills. Subsequently, the staff reached a decision that change was desirable and that a battery of tests should be employed to assess whether the required level had been achieved.

In the first stage, English department instructors were involved in the process of planning the test design. In the second stage stakeholder representatives (i.e., reading comprehension, grammar, writing instructors), actively participated in the design teams to ensure that the test level and requirements were acceptable to those involved. In the third stage the new test was piloted before its introduction. In the fourth stage all key stakeholders (i.e. instructors and students) were provided with a draft of the test specifications. In the fifth stage the testers had an orientation session where they were familiarized with the test format and practiced the implementation of the assessment criteria and the rubrics. In the sixth stage the assessment instrument was administered.

The test is comprised of two sections: a written test and an oral test. It includes four major components: reading comprehension, written expression, language in context and an oral proficiency component which includes speaking and listening comprehension. In the seventh stage, questionnaires were filled out by the students immediately after they had completed the written test. The instructors also filled out the questionnaires following the test implementation. In addition, interviews with instructors were held following the administration. In the eighth stage two raters assessed the student products, using pre-designed assessment criteria and rubrics. The grades of the two testers were then compared and analyzed in order to assess interrater reliability and the extent of accuracy of the assessment tools in measuring language proficiency. In the ninth stage a quantitative and qualitative analysis was employed to analyze the assessment process and the assessment instrument in order to assess their reliability and validity.

The Assessment Instrument: An EFL Proficiency Battery Test

The EFL proficiency battery test has been designed and implemented as a new tool for assessing the required EFL proficiency level of students in an EFL teacher education program in a teachers' college. It assesses those language abilities, which underlie communicative performance and which can be applicable from the test situation to non-test target situations, i.e. the students' future performance as EFL teachers as well as their academic performance in EFL in further studies in the future. The test comprises two sections, namely, a written test and an oral test. A detailed description of the test is provided in the Appendix.

The Research Questions

The research question at its most general level is: What are the pertinent aspects of test quality assurance? The general question has been expanded into a reliability analysis and the following 6 questions answered by both students and teachers involved in the assessment process:

1. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of the goals and standards targeted by the test?
2. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of the test format and content?
3. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of the test implementation procedures?
4. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of the appropriateness of the test administration in the current teaching-learning context?
5. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of the test consequences for teaching and learning?
6. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of the test consequences regarding possible feelings of anxiety?

Research Method, Research Tools and Data Analysis and Processing

This study incorporates quantitative and qualitative research methods. The qualitative analysis is based on a system of categories. The quantitative analysis was investigated with the aid of descriptive statistics such as frequencies, central tendencies, and two-tailed t-tests. This analysis was used to describe different aspects of the data and obtain insight into the data, which were then used for subsequent analysis phases of the research.

The assessment instrument is constructed through a process of testing and improvement. Semi-structured questionnaires were employed. The research questions stem from the problems that arise through the process of constructing and re-constructing the assessment tool and are designed to improve it. They are a means of on-going evaluation built into the test implementation and are expected to invoke critical thinking regarding the assessment tool, and include a variety of aspects aimed at the improvement of the assessment tool.

The answers were rated on a Likert Scale from 1 to 5. In addition, there were comments added after the initial rating. All comments were coded. Since the research began with a particular focus, the scope of the data which were gathered was limited (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). The research tools had a relatively low level of explicitness, since there was a predetermined objective and only specified kinds of information could be elicited.

Population and Sampling

The study utilized two groups of subjects that already exist in natural contexts (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). The first group was the population of the English Department students at the college. This population for whom English is a foreign language, has to take the EFL proficiency battery test as part of the English department requirements. The size of the group of the students was 60-70. The second population was comprised of English teachers in the English department. Some of them were actively involved in the test preparation, application and assessment. The size of the teacher population was 32.

Results

Inter-Rater Reliability

In order to determine inter-rater reliability, the ratings of two testers for each of the student products were analyzed. The following is a summary of Pearson correlation coefficients for the test components:

Reading comprehension component correlation: $r = .99$, *** $p < .001$, $N = 64$

Writing component correlation: $r = .97$, *** $p < .001$, $N = 70$

Language component correlation: $r = .97$, *** $p < .001$, $N = 54$

The data suggest a high level of inter-rater reliability. In all cases, the level of significance was at or beyond 0.001.

Intra-Rater Reliability

In order to determine intra-rater reliability, the testers were re-presented with the tests in a different random order 6 months later and their ratings were analyzed. The following is a summary of Pearson correlation coefficients for the test components:

Reading comprehension component correlations: $r = .99$, *** $p < .001$, $N = 64$

Writing component correlations: $r = .99$, *** $p < .001$, $N = 70$

Language component correlation: $r = .99$, *** $p < .001$, $N = 54$

The data suggest a high level of intra-rater reliability. In all cases, the level of significance was at or beyond 0.001.

Interpretation of Questionnaire Results

Interpretation of questionnaire results is based on a system of categories stemming from the research questions. The ordering system of categories is related to the teachers' and students' perceptions of the assessment instrument and its implementation. Teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes together with identification of the significant (* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$) differences were identified employing two tailed t-tests. Results are reported in Table 1.

Perceptions of the Test Goals and Targeted Standards

With regard to the *goals/standards of the test*, teachers and students were asked an open-ended question. Their answers show that both teachers and students believe that the main goal is to assess the students' knowledge of English and their readiness to become English teachers. Students refer to an additional goal, namely using assessment results to plan future courses and help them where they need assistance in order to improve. Analysis of the perceptions of the *standards and proficiency level targeted by the test* revealed that there were no differences between teachers and students ($t [89] = 1.01, p > .05$) who believe, in principle, that the EFL proficiency test is appropriate for the English department students and future teachers of English (see Question 7 in Table1). Moreover, both teachers and students agree ($t [89] = 0.04, p > .01$) that in general the EFL proficiency test in the college should be on the same level of difficulty and maintain the same standards as do the exemption tests given at the universities and other institutions of higher learning (see Question 7 in Table1), and that the test indeed was. They also believe it is appropriate in targeting specific purpose language skills and knowledge that are suitable for future EFL teachers.

Perceptions of the Test Format and Content

With regard to the *test format*, most of the teachers and students are generally satisfied with the EFL proficiency test format ($t [89] = 1.02, p > .05$) and agree that the respective linguistic skills should be assessed, as they indeed are in the test, by separate components designed specifically for that purpose (see Question 23). With regard to the *test content*, most of the teachers and students state that the EFL proficiency exam should comprise the assessment of speaking, listening and grammar (see Questions 3c, 3d, 3e), but there are significant differences between them (see questions 3a, 3b) with regard to reading comprehension ($t [89] = 2.08, p < .05$) and writing ($t [89] = 3.28, p < .01$). While teachers believe that all language skills are important, students believe that the oral-aural skills are more important and this should be reflected in the test content.

Perceptions of Test Implementation Procedures

When asked whether external or internal graders (i.e., their own teachers) should mark the tests, there is a significant difference ($t [46.6] = 3.59, p < .01$) between teachers and students. While most of the teachers support the opinion that the EFL proficiency test should be graded by external testers, only about half of the students agree (see Question 9).

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations and t Values of Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	df	t
q1 the test level of difficulty	3.55	1.29	4.31	1.06	90	2.86 **
q2 the test necessity	2.90	1.53	4.44	1.01	85.5	5.77 ***
q3a comprising reading comprehension	4.20	0.76	4.59	1.01	89	2.08 *
q3b comprising writing	3.95	1.04	4.69	1.00	89	3.28 **
q3c comprising speaking	4.07	1.14	4.47	1.08	89	1.63
q3d comprising listening	4.14	1.19	4.28	1.11	88	0.56
q3e comprising grammar	3.95	1.15	4.31	1.12	89	1.45
q5 required end first year of studies test for exemption	3.00	1.45	3.87	1.36	89	2.77 **
q6 test level comparable to other higher institutions of learning	3.60	1.39	3.61	1.28	89	0.04
q7 the test is appropriate	3.40	1.18	3.65	0.92	89	1.01
q8 instructors should integrate language into their disciplines	4.28	0.69	4.41	1.07	90	0.67
q9 test should be graded by external testers	2.52	0.93	3.45	1.29	46.6	3.59 **
q11 a student should engage in self learning to pass the test	2.33	1.08	3.70	0.75	88	6.20 ***
q12 a student must take relevant courses until s/he passes the test	2.50	0.95	3.65	0.92	89	5.53 ***
q13 instructors take control of English into consideration	4.15	0.97	4.31	1.00	90	0.75
q14 proficiency courses should be offered to students	4.43	1.02	4.63	1.01	90	0.86
Q16a the test reflects teaching of reading comprehension	3.21	1.42	3.80	0.96	79.84	2.31 *
Q16b the test reflects teaching of writing	3.57	1.35	3.90	1.00	88	1.20
Q16c the test reflects teaching of speaking	3.40	1.35	3.97	0.77	84.4	2.49 *
Q16d the test reflects teaching of listening comprehension	3.22	1.39	4.07	0.79	86.61	3.70 ***
Q16e the test reflects teaching of grammar	3.63	1.46	3.73	1.29	88	0.32
Q17 additional subjects were taught for the test	2.57	1.31	3.97	0.72	83.91	6.39 ***
Q18 there should be a link between teaching and assessment	4.72	0.67	3.81	1.38	38.89	3.50 **
Q19 self- learning for the test	4.15	1.02	3.31	1.06	90	3.69 ***
Q20 activities to learn for test	3.02	1.33	3.50	1.70	90	1.50
Q22a there should be yearly tests in reading comprehension	4.08	0.81	4.34	1.18	90	1.25
Q22b there should be yearly tests in vocabulary	3.97	1.03	4.41	1.19	90	1.85
Q22c there should be yearly tests in communication	4.15	1.01	4.41	1.19	90	1.09
Q22d there should be yearly tests in language skills	4.17	0.77	4.41	1.19	89	1.15
Q23 a different test component for each language skill	4.27	0.55	4.44	1.01	89	1.02

Perceptions of the Appropriateness of the Test Administration in the Current Teaching-Learning Context

There is a significant difference ($t [85.5]=5.77, p<.001$) between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the necessity of the test administration at the end of the first year of studies. While most of the teachers claim that the test is absolutely necessary, most of the students object to having the test at the end of their first year of studies (see Questions 1, 2 and 5). However, even though teachers support the test, they have reservations, just like the students do, with regard to possibly insufficient preparation for the test.

Perceptions of the Test Consequences for Teaching and Learning

With regard to the question of a *link between teaching and assessment*, there is a significant ($t [38.8]=3.50, p<.01$) difference between the perceptions teachers and students. While teachers believe students do not necessarily have to be taught to the test (see Question 18), or given courses (see Question 12) parallel to the test content ($t [89]=5.53, p<.001$), students state that they should be tested only on what they have been taught.

Examination of *offering relevant courses to students* revealed that there is agreement between the teachers' and the students' perceptions ($t [90]=0.86, p>.05$). Most of the teachers and students believe that students should be offered relevant courses to help them prepare for the test (see Question 14).

When asked whether any *activities have been done in class in preparation for the test*, significant differences in perceptions ($t [83.9]=6.39, p<.001$) emerge. Most of the teachers but only a minority of the students state that there were learning activities in their classes towards the test (see Question 17).

When asked to specify with regard to *being taught various language skills before the test*, there are significant differences between the perceptions of teachers who tend to believe the students have been taught and students who state they have not been taught (see questions 16a, 16c, 16d), the following language skills: reading comprehension and related writing ($t [79.8]=2.31, p<.05$), speaking ($t [84.4]=2.49, p<.05$), listening comprehension ($t [86.6]=3.70, p<.001$).

With regard to the question of *self learning towards the test*, there is a significant difference ($t [88]=6.20, p<.001$) between teachers' and students' perceptions (see Question 11). Most of the teachers but only a minority of the students believe that a student should engage in self learning for the test.

With regard to the question of whether students learned for the test on their own there is a significant difference ($t [90]=3.69, p<.001$) between teachers' and students' statements (see Question 19). A minority of the teachers as against a majority of the students believe that students did spend time learning on their own for some parts of the EFL proficiency test.

Perceptions of Test Consequences Regarding Feelings of Anxiety

With regard to the issue of *test anxiety*, 92.3% of the students believe that other students are worried and quite nervous about their performance on the EFL proficiency test and 80.8% admit that they feel worried and pressured because they are not sure how well they will do in the EFL proficiency test. Of the instructors, 56.3% state that they were not anxious at all about the test results while 43.7% of the instructors admit they felt anxious about their students' success in the test and wanted them to do well. The first group of instructors were mostly comprised (94%) of those who teach disciplines not directly related to EFL proficiency. The latter group of instructors were mostly comprised (97%) those who teach EFL proficiency subjects and the teacher educators who are in charge of the classes of students who took the test. They felt they needed to help their students and dedicated time to revising the material with them following their students' requests.

Conclusions and Implications

The study shows data-informed clear evidence of test effects although not all of them are the effects envisaged at the outset of this study; the different stakeholders involved hold different and somewhat unexpected perceptions regarding the test quality and its consequences. The study reflects a realization that not all can be foreseen and stresses the importance of hindsight regarding the assessment process. There are several principal conclusions to be drawn from this study.

First, the study demonstrates the importance of building on-going evaluation into the assessment process by means of empirical research to attain quality assurance in assessment. The study proves valuable as it illuminates the fact that fairness and ethics in language testing are not easily attained (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p. 138). Moreover, it proves that testing "... requires shared authority, collaboration, involvement of different stakeholders – test takers included – as well as meeting the various criteria of validity" (Shohamy, 2001, p. 162). Additionally, it shows that discussion, debate and research in a community of practitioners can potentially lead to progress in the field (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p. 138).

Second, the findings from the teacher and student questionnaires illustrate the complex nature of the test quality assurance process and allow for a more accurate picture of the multifaceted perceptions and attitudes of the stakeholders' perceptions to emerge. The quality assurance process pertains directly to those perceptions which can throw light on the validity of the test by relating to the assessment context as well as to the utility of the test for the particular purpose for which it was designed (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p. 21).

Third, the findings based on the teachers' and students' perceptions highlight pertinent implications for a unified validity framework. They provide different types of evidence some of which contribute to the validity framework of the test while others do so only partly or not at all. The following types of evidence contribute to the validity framework.

1. With regard to *the goals and the standards targeted by the test* both teachers and students agree that the main goal is to assess the students' knowledge of English and their readiness to become English teachers. Furthermore, most of the teachers and students believe that the EFL proficiency test tested what it aimed to test and assert that the EFL proficiency test in the college should target the same level of difficulty as the exemption tests given at other institutions of higher learning as the test indeed was in order to establish a standardized baseline. Moreover, teachers stress the difference between teachers' college students and those in other higher learning institutions and support the fact, that the test targeted additional domains that are suitable for students preparing to be teachers in the future.
2. With regard to the teachers' and students' *perceptions of the test format and content* results show that most of the teachers and students are generally satisfied with it and agree that the respective linguistic skills should be assessed, as they indeed are in the test, by separate components designed specifically for that purpose. With regard to the test content, however, while most of the teachers believe that the EFL proficiency exam should comprise all the language skills as it indeed does, students believe that the oral-aural skills are most important and should be stressed in the test.

Thus the stakeholders involved perceive the test as a means of predicting correctly the performance of the test-takers in some given future context that means they perceive the test as having *predictive validity*. They believe that the test actually reflects what it means to know a language for future EFL teachers. They perceive the test as quite a good representation of the material that needs to be tested, which means they believe it has content and *construct validity*. However, the four types of evidence below contribute only partly or not at all to the validity framework of the test.

1. With regard to *test implementation procedures* there are significant differences between the perceptions of teachers who support the opinion that the test should be graded by external testers and those of students who support the opinion that the test should be graded by internal testers.
2. With regard to teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the *test administration in the current teaching-learning context*, results show that while most of the teachers support it, most of the students are against having the test at the end of the first school year. However, interestingly enough, the gap between the teachers and students seems to decrease when their comments are examined. Although they support the test, the teachers express reservations just like the students do, with regard to possibly inadequate preparation for the test and they emphasize just like the students do, the importance of preparing the students for the test. Thus both teachers and students stress the link between learning and assessment stating that adequate preparation must precede testing.
3. With regard to teachers' and students' perceptions of the test *consequences for teaching and learning*, results show significant differences between teachers' and students' perceptions; while most of the students claim that there should be a link between teaching and assessment, most of the teachers do not support this idea. In addition, there is a significant difference between teachers and students with regard to self-learning for the test,

while most of the teachers support it – most of the students are against it. In spite of this, most of the students and only a minority of the teachers believe that students have spent time learning on their own for some parts of the EFL proficiency test. Still, interestingly enough, most of the teachers and students believe that students should be offered relevant courses to help them adequately prepare for the test. Moreover, both teachers and students agree that there was not enough practice towards the test in any of the language skills.

4. With regard to test consequences such as *feelings of anxiety*, results show that most of the students were worried and quite nervous about their performance in the test and its results. As for the teachers, it is well worth noting that feelings of anxiety affected only those involved; most of the instructors who teach disciplines not directly related to EFL proficiency state that they were not anxious at all about the test results while most of the instructors who teach EFL proficiency subjects and the teacher educators who are in charge of the classes of students who took the test admit they felt anxious about their students' success in the test and wanted them to do well. Moreover, they got involved and helped their students by dedicating time to revise the material with them. It is worth noting that even though both students and teachers knew the students would have another chance to improve the results the following year it did nothing to decrease their anxiety. A feasible explanation would be that since the test is an exemption test it is considered a high stake test for those involved and as such associated with high levels of anxiety (Ferman, 2004). Being exempted would mean that they have reached the required level and this is of great importance to both students and teachers.

The four types of evidence above show that the stakeholders involved perceive the test as having no *consequential validity*. The test has not promoted learning to the extent the stakeholders believe it should have. Moreover, it has created unintended consequences expressed in feelings of bias, unfairness and anxiety among the students and some of the teachers who believe that the test administration in the current teaching-learning context was premature because of the inadequate preparation and the lack of fit between learning and assessment.

In conclusion, the test has shown reliability which is a necessary condition of construct validity, and hence for usefulness (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996) since validity is one of the most important qualities to consider in how we use tests, but reliability is necessary to determine potential sources of measurement error and for being able to predict the effects on test scores. Moreover, the test has been perceived as having *predictive validity*, *content validity* and *construct validity*. Yet the test has been found lacking in *consequential validity*.

Thus, the findings, reflecting different types of evidence, show that the assessment instrument and the assessment process employed are both reliable and valid. The findings also show that a unified validity framework is not always easily attained and perhaps throw some light on the impediments that need to be overcome. To ensure quality in assessment and to attain the various criteria of validity, traditional notions of validity may need to be reconsidered with the enhancement of collaboration between those involved: policy makers, teachers and test takers. Such collaboration would involve the implementation of possible instructional changes in the

learning program which can connect assessment with learning and teaching as well as address learning needs based on test feedback. Such measures, grounded in valid assessment procedures, may promote high standards of quality assurance in the teaching, learning and assessment of EFL proficiency in tertiary contexts.

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Appendix

The EFL Proficiency Battery Test and Format

The test is comprised of two sections:

Section A - Written test

Section B - Oral test

Section A - Written Test Specifications

- Duration: 3 hours
- Students are allowed to use an English-English dictionary.

Reading Comprehension and Related Writing - 100%

I. Reading Comprehension and Accuracy in Writing - 50%

The purpose of this part is to assess the examinees' ability to read and understand an expository text, as well as express themselves in writing by providing answers to open-ended questions, such as, "complete the sentence;" "provide list/s;" "provide reference;" "provide opinion/s;" "mini-cloze/s;" "paraphrase/s;" "inference question/s;" and "paraphrase questions." Multiple-choice questions are included as well. The questions concern information that is stated or implied in the passage as well as about some of the specific words or phrases in the passage. They also require comprehension of meaning within the context of the passage as well as contextualized writing based on the text.

II. Reading Comprehension and Text Analysis Skills - 50%

The purpose of this part is to assess the examinees' reading comprehension and text analysis skills. The examinees will be required to read a text and identify or provide a summary as follows: title; main idea; ideas supporting the main idea; relationship between paragraphs; tone; conclusion(s); and (g) implications.

Writing Task - 100%

Reading and Expression Writing

The purpose of this part is to assess the examinees' reading comprehension and writing skills. The examinees will be required to read a short text and write an essay of approximately 350 (300 minimum)words relating to the topic they have read about. The examinees are allowed to use the text as a source of vocabulary and ideas, however, they should not plagiarize.

Language in Context - 100%

- Duration: 2 hours
- Students are NOT allowed to use a dictionary.

This part consists of discourse units that measure the examinees' knowledge of language that is accurate and appropriate for standard written/spoken English. There are four types of exercises in this part, with special directions for each type.

I. Language Correction - 30%

Each of the discourse units presented here will have several underlined words or phrases, one of which will be incorrect. The examinees will have to do the following: identify the incorrect word or phrase that must be changed in order for the sentence to be correct; correct it; and provide an appropriate explanation.

Example:

You won't be able to film the eclipse unless you will use special equipment. I believe Mr. Brown can assist you.

Correction: _ "...you use..." _____

Explanation: _____

II. Restatements - 30%

The examinees will be required to restate or identify the main idea of each discourse unit in different words. Cues will be provided for each restatement.

Example (1): [There will be 5 items of this kind]

As soon as Jane has finished her homework, she will go out.

- a. Jane will finish her homework soon.
- b. Jane is doing her homework now.
- c. Jane is not at home.
- d. Jane is at home, but is not doing her homework.

Correct answer: b

Example (2): [There will be 5 items of this kind]

He got his driving license in 1995. (Cue: since)

Correct answer: He has had his driving license since 1995.

III. Completing a Conversation - 20%

The examinees will be required to complete questions or answers in a conversation.

[There will be ten items]. Example:

Linda: I'm going for a walk.

Sharon: I would gladly do so but I'm waiting for John and I can't leave before he arrives.

Correct answer: Would you like to join me?

IV. Reported Speech - 20%

The examinees will be required to rewrite a discourse unit from direct into reported speech.

Section B - Oral Test Specifications

Oral Proficiency - 100%

- Duration: about 20-25 minutes per each examinee.

The purpose of the oral proficiency test is to assess how well our students understand spoken language and express themselves orally in English. The examinee's overall level of communicative ability test comprises four stages:


1. This stage of the test focuses on local information and personal interest questions the student will be asked to answer.
2. This stage of the test focuses on asking context appropriate questions. The student will ask questions for information in regard to given situations.
3. This stage focuses on listening to and retelling a narrative. The student will listen to a short narrative and will be asked to retell it.
4. This stage focuses on global issues. The student will be expected to present an extended monologue based on a prompt that will be provided.



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Use of The Fable Genre for College Literacy with Students Born in the United States and Foreign Born English Language Learners (ELLs)

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Fable writing appears a culturally relevant (Rodriquez 2010; Delgado-Bernal, 2002) tool to enhance college literacy. Linguistically and culturally diverse college freshmen in a communications course received instruction in fable writing over a 3-month semester. Foreign-born students with weak English skills were placed in an ELL class (n = 21). Others, born in the United States (n = 85), not designated as needing special English instruction, were taught the same course in separate sections. Students composed original fables with morals revealing various interpretations of life. Both groups of students appeared influenced by family and culture; however, foreign born (ELL) students expressed greater interest in events occurring over longer periods of time (.009) and over conditions culminating in death (.01), but they were less apt to write about appearances (.02) and social justice issues (.02). Students indicated fable writing was beneficial to their literary development and enhanced their cultural awareness.

Introduction and Objectives

Abbate-Vaughn (2009), and Cukras (2006) discuss some of the challenges that face both culturally and linguistically diverse college students who comprised 37% of the United States university population by the year 2008 (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES). In the NCES study the term culturally diverse applies to African American, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islanders, American Indian/Alaskan Native and nonresident aliens. An individual's culture refers to the shared patterns of behavior and interactions that are learned through a process of socialization that identify members of a certain group while distinguishing them from those of another group (Center for Advanced Research in Language Instruction, 2012). Delgado-Bernal (2002) maintains that pedagogy that makes connections between the curriculum and the historical heritage of individuals provides cultural relevancy to students and has greater impact. The goals of this study were to observe and analyze students' interpretations of life and equity as reflected in the writing of their original fables and to enhance their cultural awareness of self as well as of those around them while developing their literacy skills through the fable genre. Muirhead (2007) supports the theory that languages are embedded in culture and that understanding of culture must become a vital part of successful language learning.

Theoretical Framework

The philosophy reflected in this study is based on critical and social-constructivist theory and is influenced by ethnic epistemology. Critical theory is reflected by the work of Freire (1970, 1973) and Giroux (1982, 2009), and Himley (2007), who *evokes* teachers to inspire their students towards activism and social justice. The critical pedagogues have influenced the work of the social-constructivists, Elbow (2002), and Cope and Kalantzis (2003). These critical theorists regard the educational system as a source of power that bears the responsibility for extending

the individual capacities and social possibilities of all people. Language is perceived as a tool that affects the social structure of people's lives as they learn how to communicate more effectively. Social-constructivists explore theories that investigate the effects of context, peers and cultural differences on literacy practices while promoting cultural relevancy (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Lo Bianco, 2003). This approach, advocated by the critical pedagogues and social-constructivists, builds upon students' prior knowledge and incorporates activities which enable students to make connections with their heritage and combine them with strategies considered vital to success for college literacy (Long, 2009).

Participants

This study observed and categorized the responses of a total of 106 culturally-diverse students in a first-year, urban college communications course. Fifty-five percent of the students were female and approximately 85% received federal or state financial assistance which covered the bulk of their tuition and book assistance. The majority of the students in the course had not previously passed a standardized college reading test which they were required to complete with a passing score by the end of the semester. Due to a questionnaire which was distributed (Appendix A), it was ascertained that of the students surveyed, 55% of the total 106 were identified as Spanish-speaking although the majority of these had been born in the United States. Most of the 21 English Language Learners (ELLs) had been in the United States 5 years or fewer. Twelve (57%) of the ELL's identified themselves as being from the Asian continent, 5 (24%) were Caribbean in origin, 3 (14%) were Eastern European, 1 (5%) was North American from Mexico. There were no students who identified themselves as South American, European, or African in the ELL class. (See Appendix B for clarification).

Research Questions

One way to stimulate the prior knowledge base of students and to develop new connections is through ethnic epistemology (Delgado-Bernal 2002; Mason, 2006). Students had previously enthusiastically participated in the exercise of fable writing, the researcher had noted the variety of themes they posed and the numerous countries and cultures represented by them. It appeared an area of investigation might be to observe any possible relationships between students' reflections on themes concerning life, equity and their countries of origin. Among the entire group, twenty-one students who had arrived in the United States a few years prior were placed in a special class for English Language Learners. Students' fables were observed, analyzed and compared to those who had been born in the United States ($n = 85$) in the light of the three major questions below:

1. Are students who are from certain countries of origin, or gender or who are Spanish-speaking more likely to be drawn to particular themes or morals in a fable writing exercise?
2. What themes or morals are most likely to be connected with students' countries of origin, gender or those who are Spanish-speaking?
3. How did the fable writing genre stimulate students to write and express themselves?

Methods

Procedures

The required communications course was divided into five sections by the college registrar. The responses of two groups of students - those born in the United States ($n = 85$) and those who were foreign-born in an intact section for English Language Learners ($n = 21$) were analyzed to see if any patterns emerged. The curriculum for the students was designed to develop their literacy and critical thinking skills and all students were assigned the identical task of writing an original fable with a moral. The researcher was an instructor in the communications department and all of the students were instructed by the researcher in the characteristics of the fable genre (Kimbell-Lopez, 1999). Examples from well-known fabulists such as Aesop (Zipes, 1992) and de La Fontaine (2002) were discussed. The researcher administered a survey to the students which asked them a number of demographic questions (see Appendix A). Students were then assigned the task of writing their own original fable that concluded with a lesson or moral. The choice of subject and the moral were left to their discretion. Both the researcher and her assistant, who was an adjunct professor in the communications department, evaluated and categorized the morals of the fables separately according to their themes. The researcher and her assistant agreed that there were numerous themes that occurred frequently within the fables. To ensure a level of objectivity the Shure factor was used (as cited in Tuckman, 1999) and an interrater-reliability of 85% was achieved.

Student fables displayed considerable cultural diversity, although their choice of subject matter and moral indicated that they were concerned about a variety of themes and had different views on matters of equity or fairness. The most frequently used of these themes by either the ELL group or those born in the United States are listed at the top in Appendix C along with a complete list of 17 themes written about by these students. In some instances there was an overlap of themes. For example, a story illustrating the theme that hard work pays off could be written in relation to family members. Subject matters that pertained to the social justice theme were analyzed individually and combined under the theme of social justice. They encompassed topics of poverty, prejudice, discrimination, power struggle and equitable justice. Students' descriptions of poverty included being dressed in rags and dying of starvation. Prejudice was defined as a negative attitude towards an individual or social group and differed from discrimination in that the latter consisted of an actual behavior or act, usually negative, toward an individual or a group of people (The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, 2005). A power struggle was seen as any battle for justice between two or more forces, and equitable justice was the term used to label students' description of an act they thought was merited by a previous action, ("What goes around comes around.")

Toward the end of the semester students were asked to share their work with their classmates. A booklet for each of the classes was created, printed and bound by the college. These booklets contained each of the student's fables with their own artistic illustrations or artwork. In all of the sections of the course, students presented their individual work to their classmates. There was a special Learning Communities Fair at the college in which all of the ELLs spoke to others in the college community about their fables project. Students were asked to write com-

ments about the fables project at the end of the semester.

Data Analysis

Students' fables were each codified according to themes consisting of subject matter and or morals that often reoccurred in the fables. These 17 themes are described in Appendix C. Data collected from the students was analyzed using Predictive Analytics Software (PASW, formerly known as SPSS) to run frequency analyses and Chi-square tests to study the first two research questions.

The Chi Square tests (see Table 1) were computed to determine whether inclusion of any of the 17 specific themes (including an overall category of social justice) was associated with the dependent variables of (a) ELL versus Born in the USA, (b) being Spanish-speaking, and (c) gender. For the third research question, students were asked during their regular class time if they believed the fables genre helped them to express themselves. The written comments from both the ELL and Born in the United States classes and the discussion of student reactions to the Learning Communities Fair and to their in-class presentations on fables were noted and categorized. These comments were divided into three general categories: the Learning Communities Fair, the fables work, and the in class presentations. Some of the responses are noted in Appendix D.

Results and Discussion

There were 21 participants in the ELL group compared to 85 US-born participants. Chi square tests found that ELL status was associated with less frequent use of Appearances ($\chi^2 [1, n = 106] = 5.70, p = .02$) and Social Justice themes ($\chi^2 [1, n = 106] = 5.44, p = .02$). ELL status was also associated with increased use of themes of Death as a Consequence ($\chi^2 [1, n = 106] = 7.76, p = .01$) and Time Process ($\chi^2 [1, n = 102] = 6.84, p = .009$). None of the other themes showed significant associations with ELL status (see Table 1).

Table 1 *Comparison of the ELL Status With Those Born in the United States: Presence of Significant Themes Associated with Born in the USA and Foreign-born English Language Learners (ELLs) Status*

Theme	n^a	(%)	n^a	(%)	χ^2	df, N	p
	US Born (n = 85)		ELL Group (n = 21)				
Appearances	31	(36.5)	2	(9.5)	5.70	1, 106	.02
Death as a Consequence	6	(7.1)	6	(28.6)	7.76	1, 106	.01
Social Justice	40	(47.1)	4	(19.0)	5.44	1, 106	.02
Time Process	18	(22.2)	12	(61.9)	6.84	1, 102	.009

^a denotes the number of participants using the theme

Despite animals being the predominant actors in the sample fables, the students showed a strong preference for utilizing human actors in their fables-18 (85.7%) of the English Language Learners in the ELL class and 58 students (68.2%) who were in the other classes and born in the United States. The factors behind this choice require additional research. It is interesting, but not surprising to note, that family issues were popular with both the ELLs and those born in the United States with approximately 23% of each of these groups writing about this topic (Appendix C).

Themes Expressed by Students Born in the United States

Appearances. Themes that stressed the importance of appearance and about how one could be deceived by appearances were expressed more frequently (.02) by this group of students. A number of philosophers of the modern era have written about the evils of modern Western civilization with its emphasis on the self, commercialism and materialism (Barsamian & Chomsky, 2001; Solzhenitsyn, 1978). In this study the Western world refers to the United States and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an alliance which consists of the United States and 28 European and Eastern European countries. Chomsky discusses how the corporate culture and electronic media are able to influence public opinion for power and profit (Barsamian & Chomsky). It is likely that students born in the United States may have been influenced by their general surroundings and the American media (Jones, 2009; McLuhan & Fiore, 1967) even if their parents came from other countries.

Social justice. Students born in the United States used this theme significantly more (.02) than the students who were in the English Language Learners class. These students may have been more likely to have been exposed to an educational philosophy which supported theories of social justice due to the pedagogical influence of one of its earliest proponents in the American system, John Dewey (1916). Dewey's text, *Democracy and Education*, is frequently required reading in colleges in the United States where educational theory is taught. Social Justice is a topic which may have been incorporated into the curricula in the United States along with the use of multicultural literature and theories of culturally responsive teaching fostered by Freire (1971), who acquired a vast number of followers in the United States. Although there are those who would argue that the system of education in North America does not sufficiently promote critical relevancy (Giroux, 1982, 2009), schools in the United States may support this objective to a greater extent than those in the Caribbean or Asia.

Themes Expressed by English Language Learners in the ELL class, Born Outside of the United States

Death as a consequence. The English Language Learners were more likely (.01) to use themes where death was a natural consequence of poor decisions, indecision, laziness or starvation. Although both Caribbean and Asians wrote about actions which resulted in death, this theme appeared much more frequently in the East Asian population in the ELL class. Several established authorities on the topic of death and dying (Aries, 1974, 2002; Kuber-Ross, 1969) have compared the attitudes of the Western and Eastern culture on this topic. Although influ-

enced by Judeo/Christian philosophy, Western society is described by these authors as being largely secular and one in which people are fearful of death and feel separated from their family and home. Kuber-Ross contends that many of the elderly population in Western society fear they will lose their autonomy and control of decision making in the last stages of their lives. Legalistic aspects of contemporary Western Society as described by Solzhenitsyn (1978) are another source of apprehension about death. These fears lead to death being considered inappropriate as a discussion theme. On the other hand, rather than focusing on the individual in society and the Western self-centered approach to society (Solzhenitsyn), the Confucian influence on the Asian culture stresses the importance of others and the strength and independence of the family unit (Lee, 2009). This aspect of Confucian philosophy is shared with Taoist and Buddhist followers who see death a continuum in which the human spirit exists after death (Tu, 1985) and the theme is not taboo.

The results of the present study reflect some of the theories of Geert Hofstede (1984; 2001) who wrote extensively on the values and beliefs of people related to their culture and to their countries of origin. Hofstede devised a survey (1984; 2001) to measure these cultural values and, among other identifying dimensions, he maintained that cultures tended to be either individualistic or collectivistic or had long term or short term orientations. The Asian cultures were categorized as being more family and group oriented, or collectivistic, whereas people in the United States were identified as more self-oriented or individualistic. The Hofstede survey (1984; 2001) indicated that Asian cultures were more likely to take a long term view of a situation where importance was attached to actions that affect the future. On the other hand, the culture associated with the United States was identified as short term and one which was more concerned with immediate actions and rapidly predictable results. Numerous studies (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2011; Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000) have noted the effects of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and demonstrated the collectivistic and individualistic link between the groups according to their culture and geographical location. In their study Senyshyn et al., also noted that one of the important reasons the Asian college students wanted to succeed was due to a sense of accountability to their home country and to their family.

Time process. The students in the English Language Learners class used themes with stories that occurred over long periods of time significantly more (.009) than those students born in the United States. The use of this theme could be seen by Asian, Eastern European and Caribbean students whose stories frequently spoke of the awareness of time and gradual changes that transpired due to the passage of time. Although numerous social scientists maintain that immigrants to the United States feel under pressure to adopt the American time-line and expectations to complete college and obtain a well-paying rewarding job (Kruzykowski, 2011; Ngo, 2008), it may be that those who have just recently arrived still maintain a more reflective view of time. Although the recent immigrants to the United States are in transition and feel pressure to adapt to a new language and traditions, they may still be influenced by a culture or country of origin where time and money are not as directly correlated, and it is more acceptable to take a long-term view of a situation (Ngo). The present study supports Hofstede's (2001) theory which maintained that the Asian society was collectivistic where the group as a whole might look for more long term goals for a project rather than for a short term solution.

Student Comments on the Learning Communities Fair, The Fables Work, and In-Class Presentations

The fables exercise. The responses to this exercise were very positive overall. Students said they learned about their culture and about that of their classmates. It was apparent from reading the comments of the foreign born English Language Learners that they believed they benefitted from the opportunity to express themselves at The Learning Communities Fair. This college fair had been a source of some anxiety for individuals in the ELL group who were not comfortable when speaking English in front of an audience. The researcher had practiced summarization of the fables with the students in the classroom prior to the event. Each student displayed a picture they had designed for their fable and discussed the themes they had chosen. It appeared from the class responses that the group of ELLs gained a sense of empowerment and confidence by having the opportunity to express themselves in English publicly. The class presentations were well received by the students and several of them expressed an interest in obtaining an individual class booklet which contained the fables of the other students in the class (see (Appendix D).

Limitations

The results of the study are limited due to the nature of participants and may be different with subjects in another setting. Another limitation is the number of participants in the study and the fact that the number of foreign English Language Learners (ELLs) was heavily dominated by the Chinese population. A larger and more diverse number of foreign ELLs would have been beneficial to the study. In addition, by placing students into groups according to their geographical origins, this study did not take into account the individual differences that might have occurred within a geographical group.

Implications

It appeared that students who were foreign-born English Language Learners who had recently arrived in the United States maintained their links to their countries of origin. Those born in the United States seemed influenced by the American culture even though, in many cases, their families came from other countries. Themes of fables indicated that both English Language Learners and students born in the United States were deeply rooted in issues involving the family. In this study, English Language Learners who had recently arrived in the United States did not use the social justice themes as frequently as those students who were born in the United States. The lesson in fable genre provides an opportunity to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy (Delgado, 2002; Freire, 1973) that may further activate students' sociopolitical consciousness. It is suggested that educators be especially sensitive to the needs of English Language Learners so that all students may be able to achieve social justice goals.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further consideration might be given to the fact that students engaged in the fables les-

son were representative of several cultures. It is suggested that in addition to the classic fables of Aesop and La Fontaine presented at the commencement of the lesson that fables from countries represented in a multi-cultural classroom be given as examples. Presented fable themes should be limited and diverse to avoid establishing a theme bias in students' theme choice.

As a result of analyzing student responses in this present study, some additional suggestions might be made to the college instructor for implementation of the fables lesson in a World Language classroom. Foreign students continued expressions of anxiety about speaking English in front of their peers was apparent in this study, and corroborated by other research (Senyshyn et al., 2000). It is recommended that increased time be allowed for small group work where students of varying languages are placed in clusters and asked to present their fables work orally to each other before engaging in a whole class presentation. An event such as The Learning Communities Fair seemed at first to be daunting to the English Language Learners who were required to speak in a public setting. However, students indicated they were encouraged when others listened to their presentations supportively. In a multi-cultural classroom increased class time might be spent on self-introductions and discussion of roots of origin. This study was supportive of research which indicates that increased social interaction and cross cultural communication reduces barriers to learning and enhances adjustment to a new environment (Hartshorne & Baucom, 2007).

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Appendix A

Survey Administered to Students

Questionnaire Relating To The Use Of Fables

I am trying to understand if any fables or proverbs you have written about in class might have been influenced by anything special in your background or education. These questions are de-

signed to help me with a project I am doing on this subject. If you can give me any information on the following topics, please do so. If you do not feel like answering the questions you don't have to do so. Whatever you say will be anonymous, and it will not affect your grade in the reading class.

Name:

Class and Section:

- What country did your family come from?
- How long have you been in this country? Were you born here?
- What is the first language that you spoke?
- Had you heard of fables or proverbs before coming to this class?
If so, how or from whom did you hear about fables or proverbs?
- Do you have any fables, proverbs or stories with a lesson attached that you associate with you country?
- Do you follow a particular religion or belief that tells religious stories with some kind of a lesson or moral?

Appendix B

Countries of Origin According to Self-Identification

Students Born in the United States (Total 85)

	Students/Totals
North America (<i>Born In the United States</i>)	85
United States (Students identifying themselves as American)	
African-American	4 of the 85 total students, identifying themselves as African-American

Students in the ELL Class (Total 21)

	Students/Totals
Mexico	1
Caribbean	5
Dominican Republic	4 (Caribbean, born in the Dominican Republic)
Haiti	1 (Caribbean, born in Haiti)
Asia	12
China	11 (born in China)
Viet Nam	1 (born in Viet Nam)
Eastern Europe	3
Poland	1 (born in Poland)
Russia	1 (born in Russia)
Ukraine	1 (born in Ukraine)
Total	106 Students

Appendix C
The Most Frequently-Used Themes

Students/Percentages

Theme	ELLs (21 students)	Born in U.S.A. (85 Students)
Animal	6/28.6%	26/30.6%
Appearance	4/19.0%	31/36.5%
Death/Consequence	6/28.6%	6/7.1%
Family	5/23.8%	19/22.3%
Human	18/85.7%	58/68.2%
Nature	4/19.4%	9/10.6%
Social Justice	4/19.0%	40/47.1%
Time Process	12/57.1 %	18/21.2%
Unexpected help	5/23.8%	9/10.6%

Categorized Themes of Students' Fables

Theme	Description
Nature	Fables about topics in nature, the natural environment, and elements
Human	Fables about human beings
Animals	Fables about animals with animals having human characteristics
Social Justice	Equitable justice, power struggle for justice, prejudice, discrimination
Time Process	Effects of time and how things change over long periods of time
Unexpected Help	Help given by a totally unanticipated person
Materialism	Negative effects of greed
Poor Decisions	Consequences of poor decisions
Retaliation	Issues concerning revenge
Trust/Faith	Merits of having trust or faith
Appearances	Problems of judging someone or something by the way they look
Bad Influences	Negative results of dealing with bad people
Being Unique	It's important to be yourself
Confidence	Importance of confidence, consequences of having too much or too little confidence
Death as a Consequence	Poor unwise actions or decisions that result in death
Family	Stories that revolve around the importance of family
Hard work	Benefits of hard work

Appendix D

Student Comments on the Fables Genre Exercise

Approximately 75% of the students wrote voluntary comments at the end of the semester. Of this group three quarters expressed enthusiasm about the exercise. Only 4% of the students expressed mixed feelings about working with fables.

Sample Comments Written by Students at the End of the Semester

The Fables Exercise

“The professor makes me speak. I spoke to other people about my fable. It was hard for me but I could do it.” (ELL)

“I express myself in English. Other people were OK with it. I learn a lot about how to express myself. I like to hear the stories of the other students.” (ELL)

“The morals made me think.”

“The fables made me think of lessons from my culture.”

“I liked hearing the fables of the other people.”

“Our books we create are so good. We each should have one to take home.” (ELL)

“Some people wrote about very different things.”

“They made me express myself. I got to know the students in my class.”

“I remember stories from my childhood.”

“Fables seem to me to be babyish at first. But they were not so bad.”

“I really liked seeing the lessons of the other students.” (ELL)

“I heard some stories like this when I was young, but I forgot them until we did this. I heard some of these things in the bible.”

“I heard some of these things when I was in grade school from a teacher. But I did not think they were for older people. But I liked the fables from the other students. They surprised me.”

The Learning Community Fair

“The professor makes me speak. I spoke to other people about my fable and my culture. It was hard for me but I could do it.” (ELL)

“I expressed myself to many other people for the first time. I had to tell my story and summarize it. It was a good lesson for confidence. I now have more confidence.” (ELL)

“I liked the fair. I talk about my subject shortly but clearly. People were nice.” (ELL)

“I had to find the main ideas to say.” (ELL)

“Talking to many other people was good. I explain the topic.” (ELL)

“It was nice to show the pictures I did of my fable. I liked seeing the work of the other students too.” (ELL)

In-Class Presentations

“I learned a lot from other students.”

“Many students had different ideas.” (ELL)

“I liked hearing about the other peoples’ stories. This class was interesting.”

“I liked the stories that my friends had. I enjoyed their presentations.”

“The book our class made was great. I want one. I got a copy of my fable and the picture I did to take home. I would like to be able to have copies of all the students’ fable and their photos.”

“I thought it was boring until I heard the fables of the class. Some people really had interesting fables from their countries.”


“Some people talk too much but the professor said “get to your main point.” That was a good idea.” (ELL)

“I like talking about my fable, but I did not like talking in front of the class, but I did it and they were nice about it.” (ELL)



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Applying Teacher Feedback: Grounded Theory Perspective

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Results from theory-first research on error feedback are open to doubt as they come from comparing different techniques of error feedback under erratically varying conditions. Using open-ended interviews and in step with the sampling procedures of Grounded Theory, this article sampled 15 experienced EFL teachers to reveal their perceptions concerning conditions that help teachers distinguish error feedback techniques to serve individual and group differences. The thoroughgoing coding system of the grounded theory method yielded a set of categories including: Specialized Teacher Feedback as the core (central) category, together with such sub-categories as Students' Goals, Students' Age Group, Students' Level of Language Mastery, Task Objective and Source of Error. The aforementioned justify, with the fewest possible categories, the conditions that determine the importance of error feedback. Further studies need to be conducted to discover more determining conditions in other contexts. The results of this study provide new impetus to turning the situated knowledge of feedback into a genuine understanding applicable to a wide array of professional EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings.

Introduction

With the benefit of integrating theory and practice, it can be theorized that two crucial conditions promote progress in English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) contexts. One is involvement in communication or communicative tasks in which students can generate and test hypotheses about the target language (Rosa & Leow, 2004). Still, the other is providing error feedback which helps students evaluate, reflect and change their linguistic performance (Jensen, Kornell, & Bjork, 2010). General opinion is that EFL makes it possible for language learners to notice the gap between the forms they produce and the target language forms. In cases where teachers emphasize meaning at the cost of the form, learners may achieve inadequate mastery necessary to tackle their accuracy problems. Conversely, when they go for the latter and disregard the former, learners show low performance in communicating the desired meaning. While several feedback studies have signaled a massive void concerning teacher views in this respect (Lee, 2004; Norouzian & Farahani, 2012), there is a dearth of systematic research on teachers' perceptions as to when and how to apply feedback. This, as the main reason of the current study, reflects the fact that research on error feedback has been theory-driven in method. Adding these together, the field is in pressing need of data-driven approaches to synthesize language teachers' perceptions on error feedback rather than to test preconceived hypotheses based upon prevalent theories of second language learning. In this study, following a grounded methodology, this researcher set aside his preconceived notions about *Error Feed-*

back in order to: 1) elicit teachers' perception data on error feedback and 2) identify the key conditions governing feedback application.

Background of the Study

For many feedback scholars, error feedback is rooted in a backlog of polarized theories from the past that have culminated in two methodical outcomes. The early error treatment research approached errors from a behavioral perspective (Skinner, 1957). Hence, untreated errors of any sort were prone to becoming fossilized and demanded immediate action by the language teachers. This, over time, planted the early seeds of *form-focused instruction* with its disregard for learners' ability in communicating the learned entities in the target language. The view, then, was deemed to produce learners having a relatively high command of L2/FL linearly formal features but comparably performing poorly in conveying the desired meaning. The approach offers learners explicit information before or during exposure to second language (L2) input. This is done by means of either grammatical explanation or negative evidence in the form of corrective feedback (Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2004). More often, in this approach error feedback is employed to advance accuracy. As a result, the relative lack in communicative competence is attributed to the following:

- Meta-linguistic knowledge does not actually transform into implicit knowledge (Hulstijn, 2002).
- Declarative memory cannot translate into procedural memory. Each uses a different part of the brain (Paradis, 1994).
- The Language acquisition device (LAD) can only accept natural input (Schwartz, 1993).
- A skill must be practiced repeatedly, until no attention is required for performance (McLaughlin, 1990).
- Early focus on grammar inhibits the development of fluency (VanPatten, 1988).

Yet with the cognitive view, the resultant errors followed a logical development of rule generation occurring in the minds of learners rather than a vicious cycle of habit formation (Chomsky, 1959). Still, others tied errors to the dynamic stages of learners' inter-language development and thus regarded errors as the compelling sign of progress (Corder, 1967; Selinker, 1972). From the pedagogical perspective, however, some found no place for error feedback in their learning theory (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) and even to some it was construed as *erratic* and *ineffective* (Long, 1977; Truscott, 1996). Consequently, the latter view laid the groundwork for the emergence of *meaning-focused instruction* which fell into a paradigm shift for world language teaching in the communicative era.

With the advent of CLT, a common belief was that errors are not important as long as they do not affect communication (Littlewood, 1981). Understandably, products of this meaning-centered approach were unable to address accuracy issues as they placed too much emphasis on communication. This can be best captured by considering the following pieces of evidence:

- Despite the focus on communication, a disappointing proportion of pupils are making the transition to creative control of the target language system (Mitchell, 2000).
- The level of foreign language proficiency has deteriorated in the last 25 years. The median proficiency score for undergraduate majors is now 1+¹ (Valette, 1991).

To remedy this situation, a suggestion was made by Long (1991) for CLT to focus on *form* (i.e., teaching rules in context), rather than on *forms* (i.e., teaching rules in isolation). This entails an integrated approach to language instruction, shifting attention to language structures within a meaning-focused activity or task. One method to achieve an integrated approach is to provide feedback in the course of communication. Many second language acquisition researchers argue that such a method is optimal for learners to learn to use the language fluently and accurately (Doughty, 2001). There is growing evidence from individual research studies (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Loewen, 2005) that this type of feedback can be useful to L2 learners. Taken together, although, there is a tug of war between both sides at variance with the value of corrective feedback, Russle and Spada (2006) in their meta-analysis of feedback research, deduced that if delivered to learners in the course of communicating the target language, feedback is, by and large, advantageous to learning.

Thought to be valuable to learners, language teachers apply different methods of providing feedback. One method that has received considerable attention recently is *recasting*. A recast, according to Lightbown and Spada (2006), correctly reformulates a student's incorrect utterance while maintaining the central meaning of it. Recent research is divided on whether or not recasts are beneficial to learners. Several research studies have found that recasts facilitate language learning (Ayoun, 2001; Braidı, 2002; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002; Havranek, 2002; Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Oliver & Mackey, 2003). However, these studies have only been able to show a positive effect for it in the short run (Ayoun, 2001; Braidı, 2002; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002; Havranek, 2002; Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Oliver & Mackey, 2003).

Recasts are advocated as they are relatively implicit and unobtrusive. However, Loewen (2007) believes that recasts are so implicit that learners often fail either to notice them or to perceive their corrective intent. Regardless of this constraint, Long (2006) contends that world and second language teachers cannot reject the use of recasts in their classrooms. Experts who do not support recasts tend to adhere to prompts or elicitation instead. In prompting, the teacher does not offer the correct form but rather attempts to get the student to self-correct. In fact, Panova and Lyster (2002) discovered that students who received prompts achieved greater accuracy in subsequent language processing than those who received recasts. Lightbown and Spada (2006) maintain that trying to get students to correct themselves involves them in deeper mental processing and thus may have a greater impact on learning. It is critical to note that this technique is effective only if learners have some latent knowledge of the form. If the form is entirely new, no amount of prompting will suffice.

Another type of error feedback is the provision of meta-linguistic information on the committed error. Recent literature is inconsistent as to the effectiveness of meta-linguistic explanations. Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) and Sheen (2007) found that there is an advantage for meta-linguistic explanations over direct feedback alone. On the other hand, Bitchener (2008) and Bitchener and Knoch (2008) found no advantage for those who received meta-linguistic explanation after a similar 2-month period. It is also important to consider the student's response to feedback, often called uptake. Again, perhaps not surprisingly, there is controversy surrounding the importance of uptake. Some researchers argue that in recasting, it is not important for students to produce the correct forms themselves since such uptake may be mere parroting of the form provided by the teacher. Others, drawing on Swain's (1995) Output Hy-

pothesis, insist on learners' producing the correct form since it helps (a) learners to move somewhat beyond their current ability and (b) teachers to make sure that their feedback has been noticed by the learner. Compared with recasting, prompting makes uptake a central component of the interaction. Lastly, there are studies (Loewen, 2004) that purport that successful uptake is one of the main predictors of students' subsequent (accurate) test scores.

Despite the disagreements over the efficacy of different techniques of feedback provision, many scholars advise language teachers to incorporate form-focused activities and corrective feedback in communicative classes. Among others, the following researchers consider provision of negative evidence or corrective feedback as beneficial:

- Both repetition and focus on form have measurable benefits for L2 speech processing (Trofimovich & Gatbonton, 2006).
- Within the context of second language acquisition (SLA), negotiation of meaning and feedback facilitate language acquisition (Gass, Mackey, & Ross-Feldman, 2005).
- Attention and awareness have been identified as two cognitive processes that mediate input and L2 development through interaction (Mackey, 2006).
- Students naturally want the English they produce to be understood, and they usually expect to be corrected (Ur, 2000).
- Feedback that allows students to evaluate, reflect and change their behavior is conducive to learning (Jensen, et al., 2010).
- Feedback has been directly linked to the process of hypothesis formation and testing, which has been shown to facilitate restructuring and system learning (Rosa & Leow, 2004b).

Missing from all accounts is that while these studies provide the reader with researchers' views on error feedback, they barely synthesize language teachers' perceptions on error feedback. By far, this is probably because many of the aforementioned studies are theory-driven, which explore classroom practices through hypotheses testing. These studies will be of little use in practice unless undertaken to incorporate teachers' views on error feedback. These perceptions may throw new light and complement researchers' views. At issue here is the pressing need for data-driven studies to place teachers' views about error feedback in wider practical contexts.

Research Method

Participants

Intent on entering the field with no preconceived notions about *Error Feedback*, the study started with an experienced male teacher who consented to share his views on corrective feedback and allowed to be interviewed by the researcher. Analysis and coding of this first interview shaped the subsequent questions to be used in subsequent interviews with other participants. All participants were selected from urban schools in Tehran. The researcher sought out experienced EFL teachers—those who had been teaching for at least 7 years. Fifteen participants who taught EFL to secondary school students at five public high schools were identified and invited to participate in the current research study. The participant pool consisted of 2 females and 3 males participated. Six of the participants had earned their masters' degrees in

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL); 3 had received their bachelors' degrees in English translation, and 6 held bachelors' degrees in other content areas.

Sampling Procedure

The current study adopted theoretical sampling to bring together the data and indeed the sources of data, and to facilitate the development of the theory as it emerged. Contrary to the statistical sampling that selects a representative sample of participants, theoretical sampling selects subsequent subjects based on the information gathered from the data already code (Sarantakos 2005). Webb (2003) views theoretical sampling central to the development of a grounded theory. Glaser & Strauss (1967) describe theoretical sampling to be, "...the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [sic] theory as it emerges" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.45).

The participants were sampled based on their willingness to share their views with the researcher and limited to those who had adequate experience in using error feedback. The process of data collection and interviewing ended when the researchers believed the point of data saturation was reached and new data seemed to be redundant.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection, coding, and analysis were iterative (i.e., cyclical rather than linear). Analysis led to the development of concepts and categories but they were constantly manipulated (see coding procedure below) in the light of new data. Since the study was data-driven, the researchers tried to come to the field fresh carrying no preconceived notion about error feedback. In keeping pace with this research method, a literature review came about after the data collection and analysis rather than before it as is the case with qualitative research. In essence, the researchers entered the field to find the real concerns and views of participants about error feedback through open-ended interviews. Grounded Theory is built on the formation of ideas through coding. It uses a method of constant comparison. Through analysis, interview transcripts were fractured into conceptual codes. Then, during a process of comparison these individual codes were compared, and were pieced together to form meaningful categories. Finally, through a process of selective coding, a core category that pulls all concepts and categories together was selected. As the analysis is abstract in time, place and people, it lends itself to modification in light of new data (Glaser, 2001; Glaser & Holton, 2004). Complying with this principle and through a process of constant comparison, the emergent concepts and categories were constantly modified to suit new data. In practice, the concepts and categories were modified so that no data were left out. In brief, the coding schemes of the Grounded Theory method yielded a set of categories including: *Specialized Teacher Feedback* as the core (central) category, together with such sub-categories as *Students' Goals*, *Students' Age Group*, *Students' Level of Language Mastery*, *Task Objective* and *Source of Error*. The aforementioned justify, with the fewest possible categories, the conditions that determine the importance of error feedback. More precisely, these categories reported how participants distinguished between their feedback practices. Throughout this research, participants were informed that their identification would remain confidential. This was because concepts developed by participants shaped the whole study not the identity of individual participants (see Glaser, 1978). With respect to

findings credibility, as suggested by Yin (2003), via member checking, all evolved concepts and categories were validated.

As noted earlier, Grounded theory follows a method of constant comparison to bind up data analysis with data collection. Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin, (1998) introduced three coding procedures essential to building a grounded theory. These coding schemes respectively are described below.

Open coding. As the initial step toward category development, open coding is meant to conceptualize and categorize data. It is best achieved through two basic analytic procedures: making comparisons and asking questions of the data. Open coding starts with the process of labeling a range of individual phenomena. A number of individually labeled concepts are clustered around a related theme. The individual concepts are taken together to form more powerful and abstract categories. Once categories are formed in open coding, they are fleshed out in terms of their given properties and dimensions. These properties as Strauss and Corbin, (1998) explained are, “characteristics of a category, the delineation of which defines and gives it meaning” (p.101). Dimensions illustrate how each property can vary along a continuum. Open coding is achieved by examining the 94 transcripts by line, by sentence, or by paragraph, and sometimes by scanning the entire document.

Axial coding. The second stage of data analysis is axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described axial coding as the process of relating categories to their subcategories . . . linking a category at the level of properties and dimensions” (p. 123). A coding paradigm involving conditions, actions and interactions, and consequences actualizes this process. The focus of axial coding is to create a model that details the specific conditions that give rise to a phenomenon’s occurrence. In axial coding, four analytical processes are occurring: (a) continually relating subcategories to a category, (b) comparing categories with the collected data, (c) expanding the density of the categories by detailing their properties and dimensions, and (d) exploring variations in the phenomena.

Selective coding. The final stage of data analysis in grounded theory is selective coding, which builds upon the foundation of the previous open and axial coding efforts. Selective coding is “the process of selecting the central or core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that this central or core category should have the analytic power to “pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole” (p. 146). In this study selective coding yielded *forces steering teachers’ work* as the core category.

Results

Unlike theory-driven views on error feedback, which take one technique or another to apply to varying conditions, this data-driven study clearly indicates that error feedback is contingent upon a host of factors including students’ need, age, and level of language mastery, as well as task objective and source of error. More importantly, whereas theory-first views presume that teachers use recasts, prompts and meta-linguistic feedback uniformly regardless of

actual classroom conditions, this data-driven study, which is deeply grounded in instructors' views, shows that one technique that is beneficial under one set of conditions may be inefficient and, at times, limiting under another set of conditions. Rather than being universal, knowledge of error feedback is situated in essence. The clarification of these determining conditions accounts for distinguished error feedback as implied by the participants. Morrison and Petrella (2004) found that one-size-fits-all instruction simply would not be as effective as specialized instruction. In the same vein, participants in this study realized that direct-feedback-fits-all can be as erroneous as indirect-feedback-fits-all. As such, they distinguished between the processes of error feedback provision in the light of the determined conditions to create the best learning experience possible. What follows is an elaboration of the conditions that form teachers' approaches to providing error feedback.

Students' Specific Need

Students' Specific Need clearly shows that the process of error feedback provision is decided on via a number of factors including students' specific need for learning English. In one class, there may be different groups of students who learn English for different purposes. There may be some who learn English because they need it for academic purposes. Alternatively, there may be some who learn English for social purposes such as travelling. Whereas the first group may want their errors to be rectified because accuracy is a main concern for them, the second group may not want their flow of speech to be interrupted because communication and fluency is vital for them. Saeed (pseudonym), one of the participants, believed that he should differentiate his error feedback to address these two distinct needs:

Your feedback techniques are inseparable from students' need. There are some learners who need English for social communication. Focusing on form for such learners is very stifling. Still, there are some students who need English for academic purposes. This group takes form as an unalienable objective. Thus, you should attend to the form of their speech through treating errors. Moreover, there are some who are learner teachers. That is, they learn English to teach it. This group should not only produce the correct form, they should also have some sort of meta-linguistic awareness of the forms of language to make use of it in clarifying these forms for the students in future. Thus, as you see, different levels of feedback are at work.

Similarly, Kourosch (pseudonym), another participant, distinguished his feedback based on the same learner variable. He reminded that his being lenient or strict towards learner error depended on learners' expectations of the course. Similar to teaching, error feedback should respond to learners' needs. He explained:

If they are trying English for university purposes, I tend to be strict on all errors as accuracy issues in academic arena are of great use. In contrast, if their purpose is to use English in social contexts, I place higher priority on the fluency issues, that is comprehensibility of their utterances. When my audiences are novice teachers, I compre-

hensively correct all errors because it helps them be sensitive about their own errors when speaking to the learners as a language teacher.

In a similar vein, Mahmood (pseudonym), another participant, believed that the *what* of error feedback provision should be derived from learners' concerns. For students who need English for social communication, pronunciation is the major concern. Quite the reverse, for those who need English to master academic tasks, grammar is especially of essence. What follows better illustrates how he details his approach to serve different needs:

Let's focus on pronunciation. It is so central to establish effective communication. Therefore, a need-based error feedback would account for pronunciation errors of those with a need to use language in the society. This is the case when pronunciation, stress and intonation are not a concern for academic purposes as in Iranian schools and universities students' communicate is in writing. As far as these aspects of language are comprehensible, their use of language is accepted. This being the case, I ignore errors of grammar for social communication; I try to provide feedback on grammatical errors for those with a need to use language in the academic contexts.

Students' Age Group

Studies focused on direct vs. indirect feedback have reported different findings. Some have shown an advantage for indirect feedback (Ferris & Helt, 2000; Lalande, 1982), others (Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Semke, 1984) have indicated no difference between the two approaches, and still other researchers (Chandler, 2003) have reported positive findings for both direct and indirect feedback. The results are inconclusive and in most studies the conditions under which the technique was applied is not well specified. Participants in this study believed that whereas direct feedback is effective for adults, children respond better to indirect feedback. That said, they believed that children grasp better the target language form through implicit, inductive approaches. Conversely, adults come to grips with the target language form better through explicit deductive approaches. Comparably, children rarely understand when the teacher explains a target language rule. Mehrdad (pseudonym) points out:

During young learners' talks, I prefer to skip their errors. If I have to give feedback, I correct them in such a way that does not hurt their feelings. As long as they proceed, I never correct. Instead, I write the erroneous forms and guide them through the correct form inductively. As young learners do not know technical jargon, they cannot understand it if I explain the rule. Again, I usually plan to immerse them in examples of the correct use of the erroneous form, and I leave the rest to the learners. It is my belief that they would find the correct form from patterns presented.

Whereas Mehrdad prefers the implicit approach for children, Iman (pseudonym) explained why he does not use this approach for adults. He related his preferred approach toward

error feedback to the nature of language education in Iran. In Iranian High Schools, teachers mostly present grammar deductively. Over time, learners get used to it and like the technical jargon of grammar. He stated, “no matter how many examples I present, they expect me to give them the rule.” Moreover, he believed that adults are mature enough to come to grips with abstract rules. On the efficacy of meta-cognitive awareness for adults he explained:

In Iran, a good language teacher is one who dissects grammar to show learners how it works. If you do not teach grammar that way, they do not accept you as a language teacher. To respond to this cultural expectation, I often prepare a list of ill-formed sentences learners made during their communicative efforts. Then in the practice phase of my class, I help learners get the correct form through giving rules and explanations. I like delayed error feedback for two reasons: first, it helps me approach errors systematically through planning, and second, it does not interrupt students as they struggle to convey their meaning.

While both participants prefer delayed feedback rather than the immediate, on the spot feedback, they follow two different approaches to help learners become aware of the target language form. Young learners get the right form better through discovery provided that teachers present them with ample examples. Conversely, adults better understand the target form via explanation. This, however, does not imply that adults do not need examples.

Level of Language Mastery

Participants believed that depending on students’ levels of language mastery they use different methods and different degrees of error feedback. They specialized their feedback techniques based upon two distinct objectives: fluency and accuracy. Most of the participants seemed to agree that at lower levels of proficiency they should focus on fluency. When learners are able to convey their intended meaning fluently, they focus on accuracy. It is at this stage that error feedback comes into play. Mahgol (pseudonym) explains:

At lower levels, I focus on communication and learners’ communicative intent rather than the form of their speech. At these levels we should rarely correct learners’ errors for two reasons: first, correcting de-motivates learners, and second, they are likely to encounter and discover the correct form at other higher levels. At higher levels, I correct learners directly by showing what the erroneous form is and then try to present them with the relevant linguistic information through explanation.

When Samaneh related infrequent feedback at the early stages to learners’ motivation to communicate, Samira linked it to creating confidence in beginners. She believed that feedback might create the feeling of incompetency in learners. To justify her position she explained:

It depends on how well students can communicate. At lower levels, I ignore ill-formed structures because the main objective is to enable students to communicate. Correcting errors may erode their confidence and they may come to the conclusion that they are not able to communicate. At this stage, I try to appreciate their efforts to get their meanings across. At higher levels, I try to devote some time to form-focused tasks. In these tasks, I clearly state that the purpose is language learning rather than communication and I try to correct their errors through exposure and explanation.

Task Goal

One teaching unit may be organized around different types of tasks. Whilst some aim to involve students in communication, others may aim at presenting learners with practice. Moreover, some tasks are devoted to developing pronunciation and some to improving grammar and vocabulary. One of the common pitfalls of error feedback is to correct all errors irrespective of the objective of the task. This unsystematic approach not only disrupts communication, it is also useless in terms of creating form-awareness. Participants believed that what to correct depends on the task objective. Sadegh (pseudonym) stated:

In observing classes, I have found that error feedback is very unsystematic. That is, each and every mistake is corrected on the spot. I believe that error feedback should be systematic. I believe that error feedback should be in line with the objectives of the task in hand. That is, if we teach grammar, we should correct grammatical mistakes. If the purpose of the task is to improve learners' pronunciation, I focus on their pronunciation errors and try to ignore errors in other areas such as grammar or word choice. I believe if you correct everything, you correct nothing; the reason being that students lose the objective of the task and they do not learn anything at all.

Another participant stated that her teaching objectives are twofold: communication and practice. Thus, she divides class time into two phases to respond to the specified objectives respectively. The interesting point about her approach is that she limits error feedback to the practice phase. She stated:

There are two distinct phases in my class: a communication phase and a practice phase. When my students communicate, I never correct their errors. I encourage them to concentrate on meaning and get it across by any means. On the other hand, in the practice phase of the class I focus on form. During communication, I write students' major errors down. Then in the practice phase, I write the errors on the board and help the students internalize the correct form through inductive and deductive approaches: inductive for children and deductive for adults.

Source of Error

One cannot start *feedbacking* without first distinguishing the source of errors. In Audio-lingualism teachers' recognized interlingual errors (i.e., errors that are caused by first language habits), as the only source of errors. Today, however, such a supposition is not accepted. Thus, teachers should differentiate their approach to error feedback depending on the source of the error. Participants in this study distinguished two main sources of error: interlingual errors and intralingual errors. This realization helped them select different approaches for each. Abbas (pseudonym) explained:

While students are communicating, I write their errors down. Then I classify them into interlingual and intralingual errors. For each group, I follow a different strategy. For interlingual errors, I try to juxtapose the first language form and the target language form on the board. Then through explanation, I try to make students aware of the differences. As for the second group, i.e., intralingual errors, I never correct them, since I believe that through further exposure to the target language, learners will discover the correct form and they will self-correct the faulty rule that produces the faulty form.

Similarly Sepehr (pseudonym) reiterated that it is the realization of the source of error that helps him differentiate between which errors to correct and which errors to ignore. Sometimes students wrap target language words in first language structures.

Sometimes, however, they use the target language structure but it is faulty or limited. He believed that the latter type does not require any correction since through further exposure to the target language structure the learner will realize the correct structure and self-correct his or her speech. As to the former, he added:

Some of my colleagues distrust theoretical findings but I personally believe that if they are applied in the right time and place they pay off. For instance, I always rely on contrastive analysis to correct errors that are rooted in their first language. When my students do not know a target language structure, they suppose that they can pick it up from their first language. For instance, when a student says, "I am agree" or "Parviz married with Mahnaz," I am sure that he is using Persian structures to speak English. By juxtaposing the first language structure and target language structure, I make them aware of the differences. I do believe that leaning a new language involves overcoming the differences between first language structures and target language structures. Although very useful, it never works for intralingual errors. I never correct these errors since I believe that students will discover the correct rule on their own.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion and Conclusion

Notwithstanding intellectual rigor and theoretical sensitivity of formulating a Grounded Theory, there are certain limitations attendant in the application of the findings. It is prudent to consider how interviewer and interviewees negotiate face or manage impressions (Goffman, 1959) in an interview. An interview is but a snapshot in time. Much goes unexplored about events and persons even with the intention of the interviewer to provide a holistic account. Without a doubt, more interviews in other contexts would offer fuller insights into data-driven error feedback research.

Although the participants in the present research study were not up-to-date with literature, years of teaching experience had led them to the realization that they cannot fully respond to the individual differences. These differences included background, age, level, purpose, etc. That is why they elected to apply one technique of error feedback for all. This realization, although derived from a different source (i.e., practice, is in parallel with the latest theoretical findings concerning instruction). Connor, Morrison, and Katch (2004) found that students achieved more growth when their instruction was matched to their needs—different children with different needs benefited from different opportunities. Similarly, the participants in this study realized that error feedback leads to language development if it is tailored to meet individual differences. Connor, Morrison, and Petrella (2004) found that one-size-fits-all instruction simply would not be as effective as differentiated instruction. Along the same lines, participants in this study reached out to individuals and small groups and varied the *what* and *how* of error feedback provision in order to create the best learning experience possible. Thus, they distinguished error feedback in terms specified in the results section of this study to meet the needs of individuals and groups within one and the same class or at different levels of proficiency. Even though many findings from oral corrective feedback studies in second language acquisition research point to an advantage for direct over indirect corrective feedback (Carroll, 2001; Carroll & Swain, 1993; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Havranek & Cesnik, 2003), there are others (Kim & Mathes, 2001; Leeman, 2003) that claim the opposite. The contradictory results may lie in the fact that these researchers wrongly assumed —direct-feedback-fits-all or —indirect-feedback-fits-all. They also wrongly presumed that one technique of error feedback is applicable across varying ages, levels, tasks, and purposes.

This data-driven study, which is deeply grounded in practitioners' perspectives rather than in top-down theories, reports that one technique that is beneficial under one set of conditions may be inefficient and, at times, limiting under another set of conditions. Moreover, it indicates that studies such as the ones referred to in the literature review would seem to be futile unless they take into account the classroom conditions that shape teachers' action. Instead of being universal, knowledge of error feedback is situated in nature. The clarification of these determining conditions is central to differentiated error feedback discussed by the participants. Having theorized teachers' views, the study informs second language acquisition researchers and curriculum designers by providing them with a set of hypotheses rarely encountered in previous literature. The findings are significant to researchers in that not only do they provide them with a new set of hypotheses about error feedback conditions, they also help them modify their views and hypotheses in the light of the findings of this study. They equally help curricu-

lum designers and material developers to incorporate practitioners' views in designing and developing content-focused and form-focused materials. The findings are also significant in that they plug the gap between researchers and practitioners. Still, the findings are especially significant in that they give voice to an oft-silent group in the language education circle, i.e., language teachers, in some contexts such as Iran. Further studies need to be done to clarify more determining conditions in other contexts. Clearly, this is the only plausible way to replace situated knowledge of error feedback with a genuine understanding applicable to a wide range of settings.

Note

1. The 1+ is ACTFL's Intermediate High rating which reported to be 2+ (Advanced High) in past studies (Carroll, 1967).

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A Comparative Study of Discourse Connectors Used in Argumentative Compositions of Thai EFL Learners and English-Native Speakers

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This study examines the use of discourse connectors (DCs) in argumentative compositions of Thai- and English-native college students retrieved from the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS). And, but, because, and for example were mostly found in the compositions of the two groups. And was the connector deployed by the native speakers to denote four senses; namely, additive, causal, temporal, and adversative. The adversative sense, however, never appeared in the learners' writing. Similar to the native speakers, but was used by the Thai learners to mark contrastive facts, contrastive stances, concession, and addition. Because was also used to mark a cause-effect and a reason. Additionally, for example was used to clarify information previously stated in the form of examples. In terms of syntactic distribution, the findings suggest that the learners were more familiar with the inter-clausal rather than the intra-clausal use of DCs, associating them with clause-linking rather than intra-clausal devices, and the learners apparently had difficulties with such DCs as but and because, part of which can be attributed to the influence of the native language.

Background and Motivation for the Present Study

Writing has been proven to be the most difficult language skill even for native speakers (Norrish, 1983). Apparently, it is more difficult than speaking since in written communication there is no additional means of help in terms of nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, gestures) to ensure that the message is accurately understood. Hence, it is very important for novice writers to write in a way that makes the message clear, succinct, and easily interpretable for the readers.

A written academic text in particular requires more than just the ability of the writers to construct sentences accurately in the standard language, but also an ability to use cohesive devices to create cohesion and coherence of a text. These cohesive devices have been referred to in the literature by such terms as cohesive elements (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), logical connectors (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985), linking adverbials (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999), conjunctive adverbials (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), connectives (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002), and discourse connectors (Cowan, 2008). The term *discourse connectors* (DCs henceforth) is used in this study. The primary function of DCs is to explicitly signal the connections between passages of text and to state the writer's perception of the relationship between two units of discourse (Biber et al., 1999).

Showing different understandings of DCs in terms of its content, connective, and pragmatic meaning, Blakemore (1987) developed the idea of procedural meaning and used the following examples to illustrate this idea:

- (1) John can open Bill's safe. He knows the combination.
- (2a) John can open Bill's safe. *After all*, he knows the combination.
- (2b) John can open Bill's safe. He knows the combination, *then*.

As in example (1), the listener/reader may not be able to immediately interpret the message the speaker intends to convey in the second clause. In example (2a), *after all* ensures that the clause it introduces is interpreted as a premise; *then* in (2b) marks the preceding clause as a conclusion. Not contributing to truth-conditional content, the role of DCs is to reduce the listener's processing effort by limiting the range of interpretive hypotheses he has to consider; thus, they contribute to an increase of the efficiency of communication.

It therefore, seems reasonable to suppose that inappropriate use of DCs in a second language (L2) could, to a certain degree, hinder successful communication, leading to a misunderstanding between message sender and receiver. Hence, as part of communicative competence, L2 learners must acquire the appropriate use of DCs of their target language (TL). It is plausible to suppose that L2 learners who are competent in the use of DCs of the target language will be more successful in both verbal and non-verbal interaction than those who are not (Warsi, 2000). For these reasons, the study of the acquisition of DCs in an L2 merits attention.

Method

Research Participants and Data Collection

In this study, 44 argumentative compositions were collected for data analysis by the following means:

Thai EFL learners' compositions. The participants were 24 randomly chosen third-year undergraduates majoring in English at Thaksin University, Songkhla Campus. In the student setup, there were 20 females and 4 males at the age of 20-21. The reason for the purposive selection of the participants was that the third-year students had previously taken several English courses such as *Advanced Translation*, *Basic Writing*, and *Business English Writing and Academic Writing*. Therefore, they were expected to have been exposed to formal writing instruction in class and to have attained a level of proficiency high enough to produce extensive and meaningful compositions for the analysis of their use of cohesive devices.

Within 2 hours, each Thai EFL learner wrote a 500–1000-word composition to argue for or against one of the following four statements: *Computer games should be forbidden in universities*; *Sex and violence should be banned from the media*; *Love in schools is not suitable*; and *Nowadays women and men are treated equal*.

The argumentative genre was chosen because it had been shown in the literature that the discourse connectors are likely to be embedded more prominently in an argumentative rather than a narrative (see, e.g., Granger & Tyson, 1996). The topics selected for this study were adapted from related studies found in previous literature. They were assured to be most familiar to Thai students at this age and controversial enough in Thai contexts to elicit substantial argumentative essays.

For reasons of data significance, the use of dictionaries, course textbooks or any grammar book was not permitted in class. A questionnaire was designed by the researchers to probe into demographic data of the students. It contained personal information and English language background. The questionnaire was administered subsequent to the writing task.

English-native speakers’ compositions. Argumentative essays of English-native speakers were collected from the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS), which distributes a learner language corpus free of charge as a service to the growing community of linguists who carry out corpus-based research on learner language.

Twenty English essays retrieved from LOCNESS were written by English-native students of the age of 19-23 from the University of Michigan. The genre required was argumentative writing which was written on *Great inventions and discoveries of 20th century (i.e., computer, television) and their impact on people’s lives*. Altogether, there were 43 argumentative essays in the corpora coded ICLE-US-MICH-0001.1-45.1, but 20 essays were randomly selected for analysis in this study (see Table 1).

Table 1 *Corpus Size*

	NNSW ^a	NSW ^b	Total
Number of texts	24	20	44
Total number of words	7,887	8,350	16,237
Average length of text	328.6	417.5	369

^aNNSW = Non-native speakers’ writing

^bNSW = Native speakers’ writing

As shown in Table 1, although the number of compositions elicited from the two groups is different, it was assured that the total number of words and the average length of the compositions produced are similar.

Data Analysis

The data obtained were examined in the following aspects:

1. the DCs frequently used in Thai- and English-native students’ writings
2. the use of DCs in terms of syntactic distribution and functions

3. the similarities and differences in the use of DCs between Thai- and English-native students
4. the problems that the Thai learners have in the use of DCs

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of two comparable compositions involved the following steps. Each composition was computerized and examined sentence by sentence following the taxonomy of discourse connectors adapted from Halliday and Hasan (1976), Biber et al. (1999), and Cowan (2008). 140 discourse connectors identified were classified into eight semantic categories. To be marked as discourse connectors, the expressions must be contained in the list of semantic classification and functions of DCs as stated below.

1. Addition: adding information to what comes before and showing information as parallel to preceding information
additionally, alternatively, also, and, and also, besides, by the same token, further, furthermore, in addition, in the same way, likewise, moreover, neither, nor, not... either, on top of that, or, or else, similarly, too, what's more
2. Enumeration and ordering: signaling the order of main points that speakers or writers want to make and indicate a sequence of steps in a process
As a final point, at this point, finally, first, firstly, first of all, for a start, for another thing, for one thing, from now on, henceforward, here, hitherto, in the first place, in the second place, last, lastly, last of all, next, second, secondly, then, third, thirdly, to begin with, up to now
3. Exemplification and restatement: signaling information in the form of examples or expansion or explanation of what precedes
For example, for instance, in a word, in other words, namely, more precisely, that is, that is to say, to put it another way, what is to say
4. Concession and contrast: introducing information that is somewhat surprising or unexpected in light of previous information; linking information that is viewed as straight contrast that does not involve surprise
Although, and (contrastive), anyhow, but (as against), but (in spite of), by comparison, by contrast, by way of contrast, conversely, despite this, even though, however (as against), however (in spite of), in contrast, in spite of, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, rather, still, though, whereas, while, yet
5. Cause and result: introducing information that is a result or consequence of preceding information
Accordingly, arising out of, as a consequence, as a result, aside from this, because, consequently, due to, for, for this purpose, for this reason, hence, in consequence, in that case, in this respect, in such an event, on account of, on this basis, or (=otherwise), otherwise, so, then, therefore, thus, under the circumstances, with regard to, with this in mind, with this intention
6. Summation: showing that a unit of discourse is intended to conclude or sum up the information in the preceding discourse.
All in all, anyway, briefly, in conclusion, in short, in sum, in summary, overall, to conclude with, to get back to the point, to resume, to summarize, to sum up
7. Stance: expressing the writer's attitude towards the truth of preceding content and

introducing content in support of cognitive stance

Actually, as a matter of fact, as it happens, at any rate, at least, in actual fact, in any case, indeed, in either case, in fact, in reality, to tell the truth

8. Topic shift: marking a sudden transition from one topic to another, which is often peripherally related to the topic described in the preceding sentences
Incidentally, by the by, by the way

After the computation and classification of DCs, the top DCs most frequently used by the two groups were described and discussed as to how the two groups used these DCs in terms of their syntactic distribution and functions.

Findings and Discussion

Overall Frequency

Table 2 reports the total number of words and the total number of DC tokens in NNSW and NSW. The frequency of DCs based on 1,000 words is given to facilitate a comparison of overall figures for DCs in the two corpora.

Table 2 *Overall Frequency of DCs in NNSW and NSW*

	NNSW	NSW
Total number of words	7,887	8,350
Total number of DCs	326	226
Individual DCs	51	53

The results from Table 2 reveal that from the total number of 7,887 words in the non-native speakers' writings 326 DCs could be identified and 226 could be identified out of 8,350 words in the native speakers' ones. In spite of the lower number of words, the overall frequency of DC occurrences in the NNSW was higher than that in the native speakers'. The native speakers and non-native speakers used 53 and 51 individual DCs, respectively. Only 35 individual DCs were shared by the two groups, suggesting that the two groups had somewhat different dispositions with regard to the use of DCs.

Frequency of Individual DCs

The top six DCs most frequently used by Thai EFL learners and English native speakers are shown in Table 3. *And, but, because, and for example* were used by the same degree. In other words, both Thai learners and English native speakers tended to use these four DCs in their writing.

As can be seen in Tables 3 and 4, some DCs were evidently employed more often than others. The most frequently used DCs by the two groups fall on *and* (74 tokens or 13.41%) and *but* (62 tokens or 11.21%). Among 52 types of DCs identified in NNSW, the cumulative percentage of the first six most frequently used DCs reaches up to 51.24%, which is over half of the overall frequency. Likewise, in NSW the first six of 53 DCs occupy 54.87%, over half of

the overall frequency. This implies that the Thai learners, similar to the native speakers, employed a rather small cluster of DCs in their writing.

Table 3 *Top Six DCs in NNSW and NSW*

DCs (NNSs)	Token	%	Cumulative%	DCs (NSs)	Token	%	Cumulative %
because	39	11.96	11.96	and	39	17.26	17.26
but	38	11.66	23.62	also	25	11.06	28.32
and	35	10.74	34.36	but	24	10.62	38.94
for example	29	8.90	43.26	because	16	7.08	46.02
although	13	3.99	47.25	for example	11	4.87	50.89
on the other hand	13	3.99	51.24	however	9	3.98	54.87

	Rank	DCs	Token	%	
	1	and	74	13.41	
	2	but	62	11.21	
	3	because	55	9.96	
	4	for example	40	7.25	
	5	also	35	6.34	

% = ratio of frequency counts of an individual DC to the overall frequency of the DCs examined

Table 4 *Top Five DCs Used by NNSs and NSs*

English Syntactic Distribution

In terms of syntactic distribution, the Thai learners tended to employ a large number of DCs as coordinators, combining two independent clauses, followed respectively by conjunctive adverbials and subordinators. In contrast, the native speakers used the top five DCs mostly as conjunctive adverbials, in sentence-initial, medial and final positions, closely followed by coordinators. But they hardly used DCs as subordinators as shown in the Table 5.

It could be observed from the data in Table 5 that for some DCs such as *and* and *but*, which can be used both as a coordinator and as a conjunctive adverbial, the Thai learners mostly use them interclausally as coordinators, leading to the relatively high number of occurrences (n=70). Apparently, the learners were more familiar with the interclausal rather than the intraclausal use of DCs, associating them with clause-linking rather than intra-clausal devices.

Table 5 Frequency of DCs Based on Their Syntactic Distribution

Syntactic distribution	NNSW		NSW	
	Token	%	Token	%
Coordinators	70	46.36	46	40
Subordinators	39	25.83	16	13.91
Conj. Adverbials	42	27.81	53	46.09

% = ratio of frequency counts of an individual DC to the overall frequency of the top five DCs used by the two groups

Functions

And

The Thai learners used *and* as a conjunctive adverbial much less than the native students as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 The Use of *And* as a Coordinator and Conjunctive Adverbial

Syntactic distribution	NNSW		NSW	
	Token	%	Token	%
Coordinators	32	91.43	31	79.49
Conj. Adverbials	3	8.57	8	20.51

Functionally, as stated in Ying (2009), *and* has *additive*, *adversative*, *causal* and *temporal* senses depending upon context. In this study, it is found that the Thai EFL learners used *and* in the senses of additive, causal and temporal in form of a coordinator and conjunctive adverbial, as shown in the following excerpts:

- (1)
[04: NNS] *"I think love in school is a good moment **and** I believe that everyone used to in love and passed it."* (additive)
- (2)
[19: NNS] *"Second, when they have the test, they can help each other to read the books and tutor each other, **and** it can make their grades up."* (causal)
- (3)
[06: NNS] *"**And** the last reason that love in school is not suitable is student will waste a lot of money. If you have your lover, you will want to give good things for your lover."* (temporal)

However, NSs used the connector *and* both in forms of a coordinator and a conjunctive adverbial to express all the four senses mentioned above.

(4)
[09: NS] “Many larger factories and office building still remain downtown. **And**, the executives and business people rely on commuting to and from the city daily without taking advantage of what was once, a thriving neighborhood, and still could be!” (additive)

(5)
[18: NS] “Finally, I asked him to put my sandwich in a zip-lock bag, **and** I never had a smelly locker again.” (causal)

(6)
[09: NS] “While the rich got richer, they began building specialized shops and strip malls outside of the city limits. **And**, the more wealthy moved from the inner city (with help from the invention of the automobile) to the suburbs where they could keep a distance from the busy inner city.” (temporal)

Unlike the learners, the native speakers also occasionally used *and* to mark an adversative clause, suggesting opposition or contrast to the preceding clause, shown in Excerpt (7). Similar to an example taken from McCarthy (1991), in Excerpt (8), the marker was apparently used as a substitute for *but*.

(7)
[09: NS] “Throughout history, the trend is for the rich to get richer **and** the poor remain poor.” (adversative)

(8)
“I’ve lived here for ten years **and** I’ve never heard of that pub.”
(McCarthy, 1991)

But

The Thai learners did not use *but* as a conjunctive adverbial at all in their writing, while the native speakers used *but* both in form of a coordinator and a conjunctive adverbial with similar degree of frequency as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7 *The Use of But as a Coordinator and Conjunctive Adverbial*

Syntactic distribution	NNSW		NSW	
	Token	%	Token	%
Coordinators	38	100	14	58.33
Conj. Adverbials	0	0	10	41.67

But was used by the Thai EFL learners as a connector marking (a) a contrastive fact, (b) a contrastive stance, (c) a concession, as well as (d) an addition.

The learners mostly used *but* to mark direct factual contrast between preceding and following clauses, as shown in Excerpt (9).

(9)
[17: NNS] “Some country doesn’t **but** many countries tend to treat between women and men equally.” (contrastive facts)

The relationship between segments conjoined by *but* has also been associated with the contrast of ideas or stances in the learners’ writing. As illustrated in (10)-(11), the writers employed *but* to preface a clause expressing an opposing idea to those previously stated.

(10)
[03: NNS] “There are many students be in love in schools. I think that it is not a strange or wrong thing, **but** it is not suitable for primary and secondary students because they are children.” (contrastive stances)

(11)
[02: NNS] “So, I think love in school isn’t good if among teenager use unsuitable, **but** I think love is good if they have graduated from University.” (contrastive stances)

But was also used to introduce a concession in light of what is said in the previous clause. In this case, *but* appeared to be equivalent to those DCs such as *although*, *even though* and *though*.

(12)
[03: NNS] “Love is beautiful and important thing for everyone, **but** sometimes it gives disadvantages to them too.” (concession)

(13)
[10: NNS] “Love is very important for everybody **but** in school is not suitable.” (concession)

Even though *but* typically expresses contrast of information in different segments, as used by the learners, sometimes it also signifies an addition of information to the preceding clause. Shown in Excerpt (14), the information in *but*-prefaced clauses is added to that discussed in the prior clauses.

(14)
[07: NNSa] “It is very dangerous if you are a student and you are studying in the school, **but** you are pregnant.” (addition)

Similar to the learners, the native speakers used *but* to express four functions; namely, contrastive facts, contrastive stances, concession, and addition, as shown in Excerpts (15)-(18) respectively. Excerpt (15) shows that the writer used *but* to present a new fact that flying takes only three hours, which is in contrast with driving. Within the same distance, the latter takes about 30 to 35 hours.

(15)
[12: NS] “Travel times have been significantly shorten; for example, to drive from Michigan to California takes about 30-35 hours, **but** to fly the same distance takes about 3 hours.” (contrastive facts)

In Excerpt (16), the writer used *but* to mark an explicit turn of opinion, offering an opposing stance.

(16)
[24: NS] “*Within a few weeks, the excitement had died down and people had turned their attention to more recent news. **But** for me, this had been the start.*” (contrastive stances)

In Excerpt (17), *but* appeared to be equivalent to *although*, *even though* and *though*, marking a concession of what is previously said.

(17)
[23: NS] “*The examples on television are blown-up & exaggerated, **but** people get a general idea of different lifestyles.*” (concession)

And lastly, in (18) once offering a solution to keep out the odor of smelly food with zip-lock bags in one paragraph, the writer subsequently used *but* to add other benefits of the zip-lock bags in the next paragraph.

(18)
[18: NS] “*There are also times when foods tend to take on the smells of other foods to which they are near. One solution would be to put the odorous food in a bag, but if that cannot be done for some reason (for example, you are going to serve it for a fancy dinner later), you can put the surrounding food in the bag, to keep the smell out. A third solution would be to bag everything! **But**, there are other uses for zip-lock bags. Where else can you put ice to hold on a swelling lip, without it melting and getting everything wet? And for traveling, these baggies are even better.*” (addition)

It is noticeable that *but* was often used redundantly by the learners in concurrence with other connectors such as *although* and *even though*. This can partly be attributed to the influence of their native language, which permits such constructions as *although...but*. This ungrammatical feature of use was, however, not found in the native speakers’ writing. The following example illustrates *but* used along with *although* in the Thai learners’ writing to mark a contrastive stance.

(19)
[04: NNS] “**Although** people think love in school is not suitable **but** for me I think love is not suitable or unsuitable as a result we behave ourselves.”
Because

Compared to other DCs, *because* was most frequently found in Thai EFL learners’ writing, closely followed by *but* and *and*. Similar to native speakers, *because* was repeatedly used by the learners as a subordinator to mark a cause-effect and a reason in order to support a main idea and details in their writing. However, it is evident that both Thai learners and native speakers tended to use *because* to state reasons more than causes. This is presumably due to the fact that argumentative writing calls for reason-giving much more than fact-stating. Additionally,

according to Ying (2007), *because* used to describe a reason was easy to conceive and apply to many clauses by both non-native and native speakers of English, as illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8 *The Use of Because by NNSW and NSW*

Functions	NNSW		NSW	
	Token	%	Token	%
Cause-effect	6	15.4	6	37.5
Reason	33	84.6	10	62.5

The two examples extracted from the Thai learners' writing show how *because* was used as a linking device to express the learners' opinions or personal reasons in support of the preceding main clause.

(20)
[07: NNS] “You will make your parents and your family feel very sad and disappointed with you. Then your future is worse **because** you do not finish your education.” (cause-effect)

(21)
[24: NNS] “Love is wanted by everybody **because** it makes them happy.” (reason)
For Example

For example was similarly used by Thai learners and English-native speakers to clarify information stated in previous clauses in the form of examples. However, an important difference between the two groups was that the Thai learners tended to use *for example* mostly sentence-initially, as shown in (22), whereas the native speaker used the DC both sentence-initially and medially, as a coordinator and a conjunctive adverbial, as to introduce a list of items shown in (23) below.

(22)
[05: NNS] “Anyway, in reality, women and men are still not treated equally nowadays. **For example**, in some parts of the world, women are treated as the second class people in the societies.”

(23)
[42: NS] “There have even been forms of entertainment, **for example** videogames, made for this other form of entertainment.”

Problems of Thai EFL Learners in the Use of DCs

The findings revealed both grammatical and functional errors produced by the Thai learners. Most errors frequently found pertain to DCs with variants, missing verbs in finite clauses, fragments, run-ons, redundant use of the DCs, and semantic errors. As far as semantic or functional errors are concerned, the learners apparently did not have problems with the most frequent DCs but with a few DCs. For instance, the DCs such as *because*, *but*, and *in fact* were

apparently not used in a typical sense.

In the excerpts illustrated below, only those errors which are the focus of the discussion are going to be highlighted.

Discourse Connectors with Prepositional-Phrase Variants

The Thai learners often had problems with DCs with prepositional phrase variants such as *because* vs. *because of*. While *because* is used as a subordinator followed by a clause, *because of* is used with a noun phrase. However, the Thai learners sometimes confused one for the other as shown in Excerpts (24) and (25).

(24)

[13: NNS] “Love in school is not suitable for me ***because** a waste of time.”

(25)

[06: NNS] “There are many reason that love in schools is not suitable. Although love is beautiful feeling, but love can make a person to be deeply hurt. ***Because of** student are young, and sometimes they can not problems by themselves.”

Missing Verbs in Finite Clauses

Thai EFL learners sometimes erroneously omitted a verb in a finite clause, producing an ungrammatical clause or sentence, as shown in (26).

(26)

[10: NNS] “For example, When you love someone is not wrong **but** it not suitable now.”

An explanation for the learners’ erroneous omission of verbs in a finite clause, especially the verb *be* preceding adjectival complements, as shown in (26), might be given in relation to L1 interference. As suggested in Ubol (1993, cited in Na-ngam, 2005), Thai adjectives may be perceived as verbs due to their existence in the verb position of the sentence. For example, Thais say *Chan Suay*, in which *Chan* means the subject *I*, and *Suay* means *beautiful*. And unlike in English, Thai does not require the copula verb *be* before adjectives. The students who might not have been aware of this, therefore, produced errors in sentences with adjectival complements.

Fragments

Fragments were found when the learners tried to use DCs such as *when* and *because*. In (27) the subordinator *when* is used redundantly and ungrammatically in concurrence with *but*, fragmentizing the clause it marks.

(27)

[10: NNS] “Sometime, **when** they told the parent about lover, **but** it make them wrong and confuse in they’s parent look them in to negative way.”

Similar problems were also found as the Thai students used the DC *because*. In Excerpt (28), the clauses led by *because* ungrammatically stand alone, making the DC a conjunctive

adverbial rather than a subordinator.

(28)

[02: NNS] “Now day, teenages want to love girlfriend and boyfriend. ***Because** they think it help them about learn but I don’t agree with them.”

Run-ons

From Excerpt (29), the learners produced sentences with comma splices, making overly long or run-on sentences in their paragraphs, attributable to the Thai writing style.

(29)

[02: NNS] “They don’t have money, family can give money with them, **but** girlfriend or boyfriend don’t give money some family.”

Redundant Use of DCs

Apart from *when*, *but* was also often used redundantly by the learners in concurrence with other connectors such as *although* and *even though*, as shown in (30).

(30)

[04: NNS] “**Although** people think love in school is not suitable ***but** for me I think love is not suitable or unsuitable as a result we behave ourselves.”

Semantic function errors

Some DCs were used by the Thai learners as a substitute for others in a typical sense, as shown in Excerpts (31) and (32).

(31)

[04: NNS] “In my opinion, I think love is a beautiful thing, **in fact**, it doesn’t make student to perform badly on a academic tasks but sometime it might make you study better.”

(32)

[07: NNS] “**However**, love is the best thing in life, love in school is not suitable for me.”

In (31), the stance DC *in fact* seemed to be used in an adversative sense, being a substitute for *but*. On the other hand, in (32) *however* was used in a concessive sense, being a substitute for *although*.

Conclusion

Thai EFL learners have certain characteristics in common with English native speakers; namely, types and functional distributions of the DCs most frequently used. The Thai learners and the native speakers tended to use DCs *and*, *but*, *because*, and *for example* in their writing. The native speakers used fewer DCs in their essays than the non-native speakers. This is partially due to the superfluous use of coordinators by the Thai learners. In terms of individual DCs, *because*, *but*, *and*, and *for example* were most intensively deployed by the Thai learners, compared to the use of *although*, *though*, *on the other hand*, *due to*, etc. This is partly due to the

fact that the learners had more exposure to and familiarity with the use of some common DCs (e.g., *and*, *but*, *because*) probably as substitutes for those less-preferable DCs.

When comparing the use of *and*, *but*, *because*, and *for example* by the Thai learners and the native speakers, the two groups used *and* to perform additive, causal and temporal functions, but the adversative function was only found in the native speakers'. Similarly, *but* was used by the two groups to function as a connector marking contrastive facts and stances, concession, opposition to expectation, as well as addition. Ungrammatically in the learners' writing, *but* was used in concurrence with *although* and *even though*. *Because* was used as a linking device to transfer the learners' reasons to support the preceding independent clause and argue for the main idea stated in the clause. Both groups of learners used *for example* to clarify information previously stated in the form of examples.

In terms of syntactic distribution, the Thai learners employed a large number of DCs as coordinators while the native speakers used them mostly as conjunctive adverbials. One point worth noting here is that although some DCs can be both a coordinator and a conjunctive adverbial, the Thai learners mostly used them inter-clausally as coordinators. This apparently indicates that Thai EFL learners are much more familiar with the typical use of DCs, associating them with clause-linking devices, and need be made more aware of using DCs intra-clausally linking states of affairs.

Lastly, the problems the Thai EFL learners had when using DCs in their writing were both grammatical and functional errors dealing with DCs with prepositional-phrase variants (e.g., *because/ because of*), missing verbs in finite clauses, fragments in *when*-clause and *because*-clause, run-ons, redundant use of the DCs (e.g. *because*, *when*, *but*, *although*), and semantic errors (e.g., *in fact*, *however*), part of which can be attributed to the influence of their native language.


Recommendations

To increase the efficacy of the use of DCs in Thai EFL learners' writing, the following points should be of more concern especially to language teachers:

1. Focus should be placed on helping students to master the primary functions of frequently-used DCs such as the additive function of *and* and the contrastive function of *but*. Therefore, interactive activities that focus on discourse connectors and other local cohesive choices may also be useful (McCarthy, 1991).
2. Teachers should design lessons in which the learners are exposed to the use of formal discourse connectors (e.g. *also*, *however*, *due to*, *though*) which the learners have hardly been taught in academic writing classrooms.
3. Without conscious awareness of the grammatical restrictions involved in DCs with variants, the students will probably continue to use the DCs interchangeably and produce similar errors. The teachers, therefore, must play a role in raising their awareness of the grammatical restrictions involved in DCs with variants.
4. Particular consideration should be given to the teaching of academic writing with reference to cohesion and coherence as important features.

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