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# Mutually Beneficial Service Learning: Language Teacher Candidates in a Local Community Center

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## Uniting the Corps:
## Uniting the Core

Brody Bluemel

LeAnn Derby

Craig Gamble

Angela George

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# Review and Acceptance Procedures

## SCOLT *Dimension*

*Dimension* is the official refereed journal of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT). *Dimension* was created as a venue to share timely research, pedagogical practices, and applied technology relevant to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Articles found in *Dimension* deal with foreign language pedagogical practices and strategies, curriculum development, technology integration into language teaching, the teaching of literature, and assessment.

The procedures through which articles are reviewed and accepted for publication in *Dimension* begin by the authors emailing manuscripts to the co-editors at SCOLT. Dimension@gmail.com. The co-editors then use a double blind review process to review the manuscripts. That is, the names and academic affiliations of the authors and information identifying schools and colleges cited in articles are removed from the manuscripts prior to review by members of the Editorial Board, all of whom are professionals committed to second language education. Neither the author(s) nor the reviewers know the identity of one another during the review process.

The initial draft of each manuscript is reviewed by at least two members of the Editorial Board of Reviewers, and one of the following recommendations is made: "accept as is," "request a second draft with minor revisions," "request a second draft with major revisions," or "do not publish." The co-editors then request second drafts of manuscripts that receive favorable ratings on the initial draft. These revised manuscripts are reviewed a second time before a final decision to publish is made.

The co-editors of *Dimension 2014* invited prospective authors at all levels of language teaching to submit original work for publication consideration without having to commit to presenting a paper at the 2014 annual meeting of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching.

# SCOLT Editorial Review Board 2014

# Introduction

The Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT) held its annual conference March 13-15, 2014, at the Memphis Hilton in Memphis, Tennessee, in collaboration with the Shelby County Schools, the Southeastern Association of Language Learning Technology (SEALLT), and state associations from Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. In its second year as a scholarly journal, this volume contains eight articles that offer a cross-section of classroom-based inquiry, survey research, and qualitative research on curricular topics, instructional approaches, and pedagogical beliefs and practices.

This year's volume begins with an ode to Joanna Breedlove Crane, a founder of numerous professional organizations and charter member of ACTFL, who passed away on November 23, 2013. Herman Bostick, one of SCOLT's founders, graciously agreed to pen. Afterward, the editors are proud to showcase the research from well-known and nascent researchers in the field of teaching and learning languages.

In Chapter 1, Sheri Spaine Long (University of North Carolina at Charlotte), Jean LeLoup (United States Air Force Academy), LeAnn Derby (United States Air Force Academy), and Ramsamooj J. Reyes (United States Air Force Academy) lead off the volume with "Fusing language learning and leadership development: Initial approaches and strategies." In this white paper, they "advocate for the explicit inclusion of leadership development in foreign language learning (all levels/languages), expand the rationale, move toward a definition, and share some foundational examples to help catalyze more dialog, experimentation, and research on the topic."

In Chapter 2, Brody Bluemel, a doctoral student at The Pennsylvania State University, discusses the pedagogical value of incorporating parallel corpora in foreign language education. The author explores the development of a Chinese/English parallel corpus that was created to assist language learners in reading comprehension and writing development by making the texts more accessible to them. Specifically, he discusses the experiences of beginning-level high school Chinese students and their instructors implementing this innovative digital tool. In Chapter 3, Craig Gamble (Kwansei Gakuin University) and Michael Wilkins (Ritsumeikan University) report on research related to students' perceptions of using Facebook for language learning activities in their academic study of English as a foreign language in Japan. Their mixed method study results pointed to some contradictory findings, but indicated a positive attitudinal change toward Facebook activities for language learning.

In Chapter 4, Cindy E. Lepore, a doctoral candidate from The University of Alabama, investigated pronunciation development in French language learners by monitoring their willingness to communicate. She studied participants in an online interpersonal audio discussion with classmates using VoiceThread. Interesting findings are highlighted as she adeptly points out the pedagogical benefits of using audio discussions to improve pronunciation in the French classroom. Next, in Chapter 5, Angela George (Kennesaw State University) discusses how postsecondary students of Spanish at various levels of Spanish courses understand a common sociolinguistic feature of Spanish, /s/-weakening. Her findings suggest that pedagogical intervention may be able to support learners in attaining native-like comprehension of sociolin-

guistic features. In Chapter 6, Susan Hildebrandt (Illinois State University) discusses the benefits and challenges of world langauge teacher candidates teaching Spanish in a local community center, noting that teaching Spanish to children from low-income families provided pre-service Spanish teachers valuable classroom experiences.

In Chapter 7, Felix A. Kronenberg (Rhodes College) presents digital micro-narratives as a technology-supported instructional approach for novice language learners. Such narratives represent a sub-genre of Digital Storytelling, which he situated within learning theory. In his article, he discusses how instructors can extend and enhance existing second and postsecondary curricula by using Digital Storytelling practices, in particular short, flexible, and habitually implemented narratives, known as micro-narratives. In Chapter 8, Joe Terantino (Kennesaw State University) examines the relationship between using Skype videoconferencing and student anxiety. Focusing on undergraduates studying less commonly taught languages, he compared learner's anxiety levels while completing speaking assessments administered face-to-face and via Skype videoconferencing for courses delivered under the self-instructional language program model. His findings suggest that Skype may be a feasible alternative to the traditional assessment method.

Each year the editors work collaboratively with the Editorial Review Board in a double blind, peer-review process to review and select articles for *Dimension*. We would like to extend our gratitude to the members of the Editorial Review Board for having shared their time, knowledge, and expertise reviewing the articles for *Dimension 2014*. These individuals represent prestigious institutions and are leaders in their field. Additionally, the editors would like to express their gratitude to Dr. Robin Huff for serving as Senior Reviewer for this volume. While many professionals in the field of language teaching have read these articles individually, Dr. Huff carefully proofread the entire volume.

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

The Editors

Kristin Hoyt, Ph.D.                   Pete Swanson, Ph.D.
*Kennesaw State University*            *Georgia State University*

*Joanna Breedlove Crane*

## Ode to a Friend

Joanna, a pretty name, a musical name,
I thought when we first met in DC August '60.
We were among a group of fifty language educators,
to receive training for our new job under NDEA.
We were the youngest, you and I.
We were always together, it seemed;
Riding on the back seat of a not-so-new Ford
station wagon, attending the same work sessions,
eating at the same table in the cafeteria.

We became friends.
You from Alabama,
I from Georgia.
You white,
I black.
But that didn't matter,
We were colleagues, you and I.

The training workshop ended.
We returned to our home.
You to Alabama.
I to Georgia.
Though separated, we kept in touch
by phone, letters and SCOLT.
We talked about the progress and challenges of our work.
We were energetic, eager, optimistic, hardworking and such.
We envisioned a bright future for foreign language education
In the South.

In 1964, when to you I spoke
about organizing a professional conference for language
teachers which became SCOLT.
Unlike some, you did not hesitate but offered me your full support.
So through the years you have nobly and loyally served SCOLT.

Once at SCOLT, you introduced me with a short poem you wrote.
It was funny, a real joke.
The SCOLTers loved it,
but I loved it most.

You had a deep passion for teaching and learning.
You gave it your best.
You did what you loved;
and you loved what you did.
For this Alabama shall always owe you a debt of Gratitude.

Our time together has ended,
but not our love.
I shall always remember you,
in days of sun and days of rain.
Why? Maybe it's the Alabama soil from which we both sprang.
Farewell, Joanna.

<div align="right">

Herman F. Bostick
SCOLT Founder
January, 2014

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*Note: Joanna Breedlove Crane was involved in all levels of foreign language education throughout her career. She founded and supported numerous professional organizations and she was a charter member of ACTFL. She began her career teaching French, History and English in Montgomery, Alabama, and had over 36 years of service with the Alabama Department of Education. The Alabama Association of Foreign Language Teachers (AAFLT) offers a scholarship in her name to support language students and/or K-12 language teachers. Joanna passed away on November 23, 2013. Dr. Herman Bostick, one of the founders of SCOLT, graciously agreed to write this tribute, which the SCOLT Board of Directors is in turn privileged to share with you.*

# 1

# Fusing Language Learning and Leadership Development: Initial Approaches and Strategies

**Sheri Spaine Long**
*University of North Carolina - Charlotte*

**Jean W. LeLoup**
*United States Air Force Academy*

**LeAnn Derby**
*United States Air Force Academy*

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*United States Air Force Academy*

*For the Faculty Working Group*

A White paper[1] for Fawzia Ahmad, Mark Braun, Robert Carriedo, Alexandra Core-Barbosa, Angela Henderson, Salah Hammoud, Verónica Haun, Haning Hughes, Kelly Kafeyan, Alice Meyer, Mohamed Nouri, James Rasmussen, Olga Scarborough, Ismênia de Souza, and Jue Wang

During a recent visiting professorship at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), it became clear that language faculty— both military and civilians— stated that they included leadership while teaching foreign languages and cultures.[2] However, many of the same educators could not explicitly spell out their approach to doing so. This gap launched a line of inquiry about the relationship between teaching languages and leadership development. Subsequently, it sparked a grassroots effort by the faculty of the USAFA Department of Foreign Languages (DFF), including the Office of International Programs (DFIP), to form a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) to focus explicitly on the relationship between language learning and leadership development through discussion, reflection, and exploration to advance strategies and develop related resources (see Cox, 2004, and "What is a faculty and professional learning community," n.d.).[3] One of several FLC outcomes is to produce a white paper to share our experience with the greater language profession. The purpose of this white paper is to advocate for the explicit inclusion of leadership development in foreign language learning (all levels/languages), expand the rationale, move toward a definition, and share some foundational examples to help catalyze more dialog, experimentation, and research on the topic.

**Background:  Language and Leadership**

Professional and societal priorities fueled our FLC's inquiry into languages and leadership as well as the institutional mission. The USAFA mission is to develop leaders of character (Department of Foreign Languages, 2011). The aim of USAFA's DFF— that currently instructs across eight languages (Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish) at beginning through advanced levels— is to prepare leaders with a global perspective by providing instruction and fostering learning in foreign languages and cultures.[4] The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) includes leadership development as a component in the language curriculum in its recently published *ACTFL 21st Century Skills Map P-21* (2011). The map for foreign language education names "leadership and responsibility" as a critical skill for the future. Languages-for-specific-purposes educators (Crouse, 2013; Long, 2013) who are focused on languages for careers suggest leadership development as sufficiently broad to frame the type of interdisciplinary language and culture programming advocated by the Modern Language Association as a future direction for the profession (2007). Indeed, language instructors at a variety of educational levels are beginning to experiment with leadership focused curricula (Doyle & Fryer, 2013; Long, 2013; see also interviews with educators Bleess and Risner in Crouse, 2013). Leadership and responsibility in the broadest definition is useful for all citizens to foster civility, mutual understanding and responsibility, intercultural communication and good global citizenship. There is a general societal consensus that future international leaders— civilian and military— need to be both multilingual and culturally adept to be able to produce and lead in the 21st century (Committee for Economic Development, 2006; *ACTFL 21st Century Skills Map P-21,* 2011; Western, 2011; Air Force Culture, 2012; American Academy, 2013).

The content-based movement in language learning (Stryker & Leaver, 1997; Coyle, Hood, & Marsh 2010; for summary see CARLA, 2011) underpins the integration of languages and leadership development. Foundational work on culture in language learning supports our approach as well (for summary see Henrichsen, 1998). Also it is important to bear in mind that teaching and exemplifying leadership is not done in the same way throughout the world. Indeed, the idea of instilling leadership in other cultures may differ greatly from the direct approach taken in the U.S. educational arena. It may, in fact, simply permeate an entire educational structure without ever being mentioned explicitly, as is the case in the Spanish Air Force Academy (J. P. Velázquez-Gaztelu, personal communication, April 16, 2013).

**The FLC**

The outcome of a prior study at USAFA suggested that knowing foreign languages and cultures helps produce good leaders (Long, Uribe, Derby, & Scharff, 2013). This premise underlays all activities of the FLC. Sponsored by the USAFA Center for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), our FLC met throughout the semester in spring 2013. The content of the FLC sessions was principally determined by discussion among the FLC faculty members as Phase II of Long's research the semester prior. With the guidance of SoTL Director Lauren Scharff, the FLC participants set the semester's agenda during the first meeting. As the term

unfolded, the FLC members explored the concept of leadership development within the context of our institution, shared numerous cultural scenarios that had leadership embedded in the learning of languages and cultures, invited presentations of other on-going related research projects, and examined and exchanged ideas about informal and formal experimentation that took place during our spring classes. Our culminating activity was to suggest a definition and produce a vision statement of what leadership development in the language-learning curriculum looks like. (See Appendix A for an annotated agenda of FLC activities.)

### Vision, Definition and Observations

Educators want students to be responsible leaders who use their language and cross-cultural skills to motivate others to be fair, tolerant, open-minded and understanding in a variety of contexts (*ACTFL 21st Century Skills Map P-21,* 2011). There is no one-size-fits-all definition of leadership development in the language-learning context simply because working definitions must be adapted for situational relevancy. However, we did find that there are essential elements to include in an operational vision/definition in one's own curricular context.

As the semester progressed the FLC investigated the essential elements of leadership development in the language-learning environment. FLC members made the following key observations with regard to proposing a vision statement and definition for the intertwining of leadership and languages.

1) Leadership development and language learning possess a parallel relationship.
   - Just like learning languages and cultures, leadership and responsibility suggest a life skill.
   - A leader steps up, takes risks, analyzes the situation, determines the best course of action, and proceeds accordingly. A language learner must do precisely this, both in linguistic and cultural terms (J. W. LeLoup, personal communication, April 26, 2013).

2) Leadership development can be visible in the language curriculum and should be stated directly.
   - The integration of leadership development in language-learning settings should be deliberate (e.g., appear in course goals, objectives and/or learning outcomes) (R. J. Reyes, personal communication, April 26, 2013)
   - Assessments to validate leadership development embedded in language learning should follow.

3) Leadership development approaches and strategies can be generic to any educational setting.
   - Just as in other academic/experiential learning environments, foreign language learning (K-16+) fosters non-discipline specific leadership development by building in presentational opportunities for class leaders, assigning oral presentations and reports, designing group or team activities, promoting critical thinking, and praising student leadership.
   - Another generic method of teaching leadership resides with the instructor who serves as a role model by providing and fostering leadership/mentor-

ship. An educator's sensitivity toward foreign cultures is a key component of role modeling. The tone is set through the teacher-leader as role model and his/her behavior, approaches to critical thinking and analysis and attitude toward the subject (O. Scarborough, personal communication, April 26, 2013). Additionally, role-modeling/mentoring can occur instructor-to-student or student-to-student.

4) Leadership development strategies can be unique to language learning and therefore discipline-specific. The language-learning environment provides an insider's view to an outsider because of the linguistic window into the foreign culture. Because of this, language learning is essential for developing leaders with international expertise (S. S. Long, personal communication, April 26, 2013).

- Particularly specific to language learning is the prospect of learning about leadership constructs (leaders, followers, etc.) within their cultural context. This can be achieved both in the traditional classroom and experientially (e.g., service learning, internships, study abroad, foreign immersion). Experiential learning can provide opportunities to observe and interact with leaders in their milieu.

- In the classroom, contextualized activities that interweave linguistic/cultural expertise and leadership such as cultural scenarios, simulations, role-plays, capsules, situations, mini-dramas, problem solving, critical incidents, and the like (Henrichsen, 1998) also serve to apply leadership constructs to real-life situations. (See Appendix B for extended examples.) These are effective ways of constructing activities that target the development of leadership, language skills and cultural sensitivity in tandem. To be effective, these situational activities should highlight contrasting products, practices and perspectives. Such application activities typically culminate in problem solving, solution/resolution and/or reflection. Reflection might ask "what did you learn" or "how could we do this better" so as to not overlook the student's perspective.

While the FLC members considered elements of the definition and vision, they agreed that the most unique aspect of the fusion of leadership development and language learning is to provide opportunities to examine leaders, followers, and leadership in general and to explore how they might look different and behave differently in foreign cultures. The intertwining of culture and leadership variations (over time and across cultures), such as leadership style, is undeniable (e.g., a 20th Century Latin American dictator is likely to have a palpably different leadership style than a 21st Century British Prime Minister). Careful selection of materials, examples and face-to-face encounters will help guide learners toward observing cultural-specific interactions that highlight leaders, followers and positive/negative global citizens. In addition, it is precisely this variation and differentiation in the meld of culture and leadership that necessitate critical thinking on the part of learners grappling with the challenge of finding the best ways to effect appropriate intercultural interactions.

**Leadership, National Standards and Implementation**

Several of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project [NSFLEP], 2006) provide points of departure for teachers to incorporate the construct of leadership in the FL curriculum. Addressing the standards listed under the Cultures goal area and purposefully targeting culture (2.1 and 2.2) can include efforts at identifying connections with leadership as well. Leadership development can be a significant component of a language-learning environment, particularly vis-à-vis the integration of cultural knowledge (products, practices, and perspectives). The products and practices, also termed behaviors and artifacts, of the target language culture ($C_2$) can differ considerably from those of the native language culture ($C_1$). Additionally, the most compelling part of these standards (2.1 and 2.2) is the inclusion of the explanatory perspective piece:  the "why." Individuals in contact with other cultures routinely wonder "*why* do they do it that way" and the answer to the question typically reveals a different perspective. The recognition that such products and practices have underlying reasons for their existence that are specific to the $C_2$ is crucial. In order to grasp the significance of a certain product or practice, one must also understand or at the very least acknowledge the perspective(s) that serve as its origins.

A language student who desires to improve language and cultural skills and expertise realizes that the process requires a combination of language acquisition and cultural knowledge to be successful. Indeed, part of achieving success in a second language environment is navigating the cultural waterways, acting appropriately in interactions with native speakers, and integrating as much as possible into the culture. Often language learners are reluctant to take on aspects of the $C_2$ and frequently miss out on intercultural communication opportunities as a result. When presented with new cultural and/or linguistic situations, the proactive student will analyze, make informed conjectures about appropriate behaviors and actions, and then proceed toward hypothesis confirmation. These steps eventually entail risk-taking, which is a strong characteristic of a good language learner and a decisive leader. The ACTFL position statement on Languages as a Core Component of Education for All Students (2013) underscores the importance of this ability to "function in new and unfamiliar situations" and "to think and interact in a global community." These abilities are also foundational in research and materials on study abroad (e.g., Mikk, Cohen, Paige, Chi, Lassegard, Meagher, & Weaver, 2009; Montgomery, & Vasser, 2011). The study abroad community has also created cultural scenarios that are interactive and reflective in nature. Our leadership-focused scenarios share some of the same characteristics as those authored by the study abroad educators. However, the scenarios developed by language educators will generally engage language acquisition more directly.

Scenario #3 for French or Arabic, titled A Moroccan Souk Visit (see Appendix B), is an example of how these linguistic, cultural, and leadership skills can be leveraged to effect a positive outcome in a $C_2$ situation. In this scenario, having the linguistic skills to negotiate the necessary arrangements is essential. Concomitantly, understanding the perspectives underlying the $C_2$ vendor/representative's positions throughout the negotiations certainly helps maintain congenial, if not collegial, rela-

tions. Thus cultural competence is of equal value in these transactions. The language student/leader will assess the situation, weigh the options, and initiate the course of action most beneficial to all. Clearly, a lack of leadership coupled with inferior language and cultural proficiencies could lead to an insufficient conclusion or even a disaster in terms of relationships among the interlocutors. Standard 3.2 in the Connections goal area of the Standards champions the ability of language learners to "acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures" (Standards, 1999). Here again we see the importance of accessing and understanding those $C_2$ perspectives that differ from our own. Furthermore, the ACTFL position statement on languages in the core avers that language study helps learners to become "more adept in understanding diverse cultural perspectives." Without this understanding, little effective communication can take place and meaningful interaction falls by the wayside. A developing leader will recognize this necessity and will actively seek out target language sources that can provide the information required for successful completion of a particular task. In Scenario #2, Presentations on Cultural and Political Responses for Chinese (see Appendix B), using the second language (L2) to gain an understanding of the $C_2$ perspective on many of these sensitive issues proved to be of significant value. Without crucial (or critical) information about viewpoints held by the Chinese, meaningful conversations and communication could not have taken place. In addition, having garnered the important information from appropriate Chinese sources prior to meeting with the visiting delegation, the students were able to assume a leadership stance in subsequent conversations and presentations. They were not following the lead; they were taking the lead. They were able to accomplish this due to their linguistic, cultural, and leadership training.

The Comparison goal area of the Standards provides a culmination of efforts to infuse cultural knowledge into the foreign language (FL) curriculum with Standard 4.2. Not only are language learners directed toward the products, practices, and perspectives of the $C_2$, they are also encouraged to reflect on analogous situations in their $C_1$ and make fruitful comparisons between the two. Such comparisons can often effect a deeper understanding or, at the very least, an acceptance of the target culture's perspective vis-à-vis a particular product or practice. Scenario #5, Dressing Etiquette in Brazil (see Appendix B), offers a case in point. Differences in dress code between U.S. culture and Brazilian culture are marked and even striking in many instances. An initial negative reaction on the part of the L2 language learner can be tempered by the realization that such cultural surprises and consternations do work both ways. In other words, Brazilians will find anomalies and cultural shocks in the U. S. relating to dress code that would not bother a native of that country. The language learner who is also developing leadership skills will spot this conundrum, identify it as a potential trouble area, point this out to fellow language learners or colleagues, and make an effort to circumvent any potential disruption or discord. Inculcating students with the requisite cultural knowledge to enable them to act appropriately in a myriad of $C_2$ situations is a major aspect of leadership development. If/when they know how to act and interact suitably, they can serve as role models/leaders for their peers in these situations.

**Conclusion and Future Directions**

The educational potential of the language-learning environment to provide a unique and powerful mechanism for personal leadership development in a global cultural context is unique to our discipline (O. Scarborough, personal communication, April 26, 2013). The conceptual framework of including leadership and responsibility to enhance global citizenship across languages, instructional and proficiency levels is a value-added feature to the foreign language curriculum that meshes nicely with our curricular goal areas that are already in place (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities). It also complements the focus on careers in many language curricula. In foreign language (FL) classes, the leadership skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes being developed in the nation's classrooms as part of 21st century skills directive can be effectively taken advantage of, built upon, and nurtured in a *connections, comparisons,* and *cultures* approach and spirit (American Academy, 2013; Assessment and Teaching, 2013). Leadership development can be creatively intertwined with each of these goal areas.

We acknowledge that leadership teaching and learning can be intuitive or intentional. In this white paper we advocate a more intentional approach at all levels and across languages because of our desire to promote life and career skills to enhance our central mission as language educators. It is useful to summarize what we want our students to know and be able to do in cross-cultural situations locally and globally. As educators we want our students to act ethically, to use their strengths to accomplish common objectives, to behave responsibly for the good of the entire community, and to use their interpersonal and problem-solving abilities to influence and guide others toward a common goal (*ACTFL 21st Century Skills Map P-21,* 2011).

Although the lessons learned in the USAFA FLC were in the unique instructional context of the Air Force's future officer education, many of the "lessons learned" are generalizable to the broader language teaching community. We acknowledge that our "sample populations" were students at the tertiary level, but we believe the infusion of leadership can be made at all language levels and in all language contexts. So many of the goals held across these venues are remarkably similar, such as the desire to produce students with cross-cultural expertise that can enhance international communication and cooperation.

In spite of the leadership studies movement, there is scant evidence of curricular design and classroom activities that explicitly aim to relate the fields of foreign languages and leadership. This is all a strong indication that language learning and leadership education need to be converging in conventional FL curricula and classrooms in the future. This white paper provides a growing rationale to inform other language programs that want to cultivate leadership development as a core value.

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**Acknowledgments**

**Notes**

1   The concept of a white paper and what it offers the reader evokes a variety of definitions. Although the paper may contain research, it is not a traditional research paper. A white paper is an original, authoritative report that enhances the understanding of a particular issue—in this case the integration of language learning and leadership development. A white paper can also advocate for a policy issue.

2   Sheri Spaine Long served in the USAFA Department of Foreign Languages as Distinguished Visiting Professor (DVP) of Spanish (2011-2013). According to the position description for visiting professors, they provide educational leadership to their academic department, and they are to engage in research of mutual interest while in residence. The project described herewith describes some of Long's recent experiences. Additionally Jean W. LeLoup served as DVP of Spanish twice (during the 1995-1996 and 2007-2009 academic years), prior to joining the USAFA faculty in a regular full-time capacity.

3   The DFF FLC included instructor input from most languages at all levels taught at USAFA.

4   According to the department background statement, the Department of Foreign Languages and International Programs is one of 20 departments within the Dean of the Faculty. It is one of the largest USAFA departments in total number of faculty and staff and also boasts the richest cultural diversity with members with a variety of ethnic, religious and national backgrounds. The department also has the largest number of civilian faculty members and the highest civilian to military ratio of any other department. This faculty combination provides long term stability of the curriculum with our civilian and senior military faculty members, and a fresh operational perspective with a rotational military component. The faculty composition also provides cadets a unique opportunity to be exposed to a variety of perspectives and professional backgrounds, which greatly contributes to an overall positive and productive learning environment. In addition to the core mission of teaching foreign languages and cultures, the department is also responsible for the execution of field education programs at the Air Force Academy to include language and cultural immersions, foreign academy visits, semester exchanges and study abroad. These programs are designed to provide an experiential learning opportunity as an extension of classroom instruction. The Department's rich diversity and breadth of impact at USAFA and beyond make it a unique and dynamic environment

at USAFA and it is this strength that will propel it as a top tier foreign language and culture education program in the nation (Department of Foreign Languages, 2011).

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**Appendix A**

**Faculty Learning Community (FLC) on Language Learning and Leadership Development**
2013 Meeting Agenda, DFF, USAFA

*January 23*

Dr. Sheri Long convened DFF faculty volunteers to form the working group. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Director, Dr. Lauren Scharff, was the FLC's invited guest who explained the purpose of a FLC as a venue to share good teaching and learning practices. The goals of the FLC were agreed upon including producing the white paper, creating a resource file with examples of cultural scenarios and developing a vision/definition of how to intertwine leadership and language.

*February 6*

Four faculty volunteers shared a specific cultural scenario related to leadership development with comments and open discussion from the group.

*February 19*

Invited speaker Dr. Lauren Scharff, presented a summary of the content from the required course titled "Foundations for Leadership Development" for all juniors at USAFA. The class is focused on behaviorally based theories of leadership but also applying them. The discussion and examples related elements of the course to cross-cultural situations.

*March 5*

Lt. Col. Basik (PhD), Assistant Director of the USAFA Cadet Development Center for Character and Leadership Development (NCLS), presented the vision behind 'living models of virtues' which could be capsuled as the practicalities of leadership including a) live honorably in the culture of integrity, b) lift others to the best of their possible selves and c) elevate performance. The virtues are taught as required training to all cadets, so students typically possess this background when taking languages. This presentation offered the FLC faculty a vocabulary for talking about leadership.

*March 19*

The FLC discussed the previous two guest speaker sessions and suggested applications of the material presented in our teaching. Also, three volunteer faculty members shared cultural scenarios that were each followed by group discussion.

*April 16*

Two on-going SoTL projects were presented that are related to leadership development and languages: The first is a student-driven project titled Mission Statement Presented in Language Class Syllabi directed by faculty members Drs. Scharff and Long. Cadets David Heaphy and Jasmine Leyro presented their research project with regard to the placement of the leadership focused mission statement on the syllabus. The second project, Integrating Foreign Languages and Leadership Development at the Advanced Level, was explained by faculty members Drs. Rasmussen and Long.

*April 26*

FLC members completed homework to write mission/vision statement drafts to use as the basis of our final discussion. Elements of the final discussion were targeted for inclusion in the white paper.


**Appendix B**

**Faculty Learning Community (FLC)**
**Leadership-focused Cultural Scenarios**

The following scenarios intertwine leadership development and language learning and represent the collective work of the FLC. The purpose of including this collection of scenarios is to provide a variety of concrete models to illustrate how a language educator might go about teaching leadership in the FL classroom. Although the contributor identifies language and level, many of these scenarios can be calibrated to different educational and skill levels and adapted to other languages and cultures. Additionally, some scenarios suggest varying levels of target language use that can be modified by level and language. Also some of these scenarios are specific to military settings and with modification can be generalized (e.g., ranking foreign military officials can be recast as CEOs from important foreign businesses, a military logistics operation can be recast as a humanitarian organization carrying out relief work abroad, and so forth). Finally, the terms *cadet* and *student* are used interchangeably throughout.

1) Arabic (any level), contributed by S. Hammoud
   Describing Leaders: Military Officer Ranks and Insignia

2)  Chinese (intermediate/advanced), contributed by H. Hughes
    Presentations on Cultural and Political Responses

3)  French or Arabic (any level), contributed by L. Derby
    A Moroccan Souk Visit

4)  Portuguese (novice), contributed by A. Meyer
    The Brazilian Office

5)  Portuguese (intermediate), contributed by I. de Souza
    Dressing Etiquette in Brazil

6)  Russian (novice), contributed by O. Scarborough
    Presentations on Russian-speaking Regions and Cultures

7)  Spanish (novice), contributed by R. J. Reyes
    Multi-national situations (Argentina, Spain, Japan and Afghanistan: What
    would you do?

*Scenario 1: Arabic (any level), Describing Leaders: Military Officer Ranks and Insignia*

**Goal:**  To provide students an opportunity to acquire the basic vocabulary associated with military ranks in Arab armies, using Egypt, Jordan or Syria as examples; to familiarize them with the differences between these countries in terminology used to refer to these ranks; and to have students describe military leaders in simple though not simplistic ways (Standards: 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 4.1, 4.2).

**Set-up:**  Students complete an on-line search for insignia and terms denoting military officer ranks in the Arab world. They also look up the etymology for these words, preferably in a root- entry- bilingual dictionary, such as the Hans Wehr *Dictionary of Written Arabic.* They read in English a biographical summary of historical and contemporary figures like Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, and Moammar Gaddafi of Libya, paying attention to how they are described (the adjectives used) and any clues as to their leadership styles.

**Execution:**

1)  Using a slide visual, students study shoulder board insignia for officer ranks of Egyptian Air Force officers and their equivalent in the U.S. Air Force. For lower level students, some contextualized grammar practice of various irregular adjectival forms is required as well as a review of noun adjective agreement. For the advanced level students, work with derivations for each of the rank titles along with a discussion of what each rank means; determine if those meanings reflect actual responsibilities carried out by officers in the real world.

2)  Have students learn the referent terms by using them in meaningful practice: What does a lieutenant do in a unit?  Where do you think you will be when you are (promoted to the rank of) a Captain; What kind of a house and car will you be able to afford as a Major? What rank comes after a Colonel?  Will you remain in the Air Force thirty years to make that rank? What do you suppose the salary of a Lieutenant Colonel is in Egypt? In Saudi Arabia? How many officers at the rank of General are left in the Syrian Army? How many have defected to the opposition?

3) Have students view a vintage speech, a YouTube clip of a speech by Colonel Nasser (Egypt), and discuss the kind of military officer we think he was from the video. Now using adjectives denoting positive and negative leadership qualities (e.g., caring, effective, inspiring, blind-sighted, cool, tyrannical, etc.) have students discuss real world examples.

4) If there is an international student available from one of the Arab-speaking countries, invite him/her to speak about the military hierarchy in his/her home country. Have students ask the guest speaker lots of questions!

**Assessment:** Students present to the class the profile of the leaders they learned about.

**Reflective Statement:** A writing assignment may follow (or be part of) this activity. Students describe a past of present figure in terms of his/her leadership skill. While this may be expanded to include heroes who are not necessarily military ones, it should include and synthesize some of the learning achieved in the unit/lesson/activity. By incorporating Standard 4.2, it helps learners see cultural differences and similarities in practices, and perspectives in leaders and leader behavior.

*Scenario 2: Chinese (intermediate/advanced), Presentations on Cultural and Political Responses*

**Goal:** To enhance students' critical thinking and leadership skills on culturally and politically sensitive issues with regard to U.S. relations with the PRC (China) and ROC (Taiwan), and to develop problem-solving skills and practice interacting and communicating with high-ranking Chinese government and military officials (Standards: 1.3, 2.1, 3.1, 5.2).

**Set-up:** The students are divided into several groups to develop their own possible situations arising from sensitive issues and practice and present them in the Chinese language to the entire class.

**Execution:** Each group of students presents their discussed situations. Within each group, some students role-play as U.S. military officers; others are Chinese Communist Party officials and Chinese Liberation Army officers. They properly greet each other, and have open dialogs on cultural, military and political issues concerning China and the U.S.

**The Situation:** A delegation of forty high-ranking officials from the Communist Party of China comes to visit USAFA for one day. You are tasked to create an itinerary for this visit, which includes dedicating two students to present a briefing about the U.S. military mission in Chinese, hosting Round Table discussions, organizing lunch, and finally providing a tour of the facilities. In addition to displaying proper etiquette in welcoming the high-ranking Chinese officials, the focal point of the situation resides in culturally and politically sensitive questions that may be raised by the Chinese delegation or our own mock military students. Discuss and present your viewpoint of the following issues. Some issues are easier to discuss than others. The second group will be harder to discuss diplomatically and will require cautionary considerations.

Easier
1. Chinese educational system
2. Future exchange programs between USAFA and the Chinese Air Force Academy
3. Cooperation between China and the US on space development and related issues
4. China's fast growing economy and its future

Harder
1. Sovereignty issues: China and Taiwan
2. Recent dispute over the Diaoyu Island between China and Japan
3. Human rights issues: Tibet and China
4. Fall of a former Chinese politician: the Bo Xilai scandal

**Assessment:** The assessment occurred through the application of this real world situation. The Chinese delegation visit was a true event (Spring 2013). We organized for the visit in class prior to the official visit, and students fully prepared themselves for dealing with all types of issues that might occur. As a result, the students involved in the Chinese delegation visit successfully accomplished all tasks. The students represented their institution by displaying intelligence, appropriate knowledge and cultural and political sensitivity, making a positive impression on the members of the delegation.

**Reflective Statement:** Face-to-face cultural/linguistic interactions like these enhance students' target language communication skills, improve students' cultural awareness and leadership skills, and motivate them to continue language study. Although all students know they need to perfect their language abilities, these situations provided a concrete target, and opened participants' eyes as to how important it is to develop their leadership and diplomatic relationship skills. The students learned that their organizational leadership abilities and their cultural awareness go hand-in-hand with language learning.

*Scenario 3: French or Arabic (any level), A Moroccan Souk Visit*

**Goal:** To provide the students an opportunity to react in a leadership role while taking into account their understanding of the products, practices, and perspectives of the Maghreb (Standards: 2.1, 2.2, 4.2).

**Set-up:** The scenario and subsequent follow-ups are on PowerPoint slides. The Air Force is sending 50 airmen to Rabat (Morocco) for a short time to respond with humanitarian aid to a crisis or natural disaster. As contracting lieutenants, your team needs to negotiate with a local vendor at the souk to purchase food to prepare in the portable kitchen that has been set up by the Civil Engineering team. After each element (outlined below in stages) is added to the situation, students discuss their response in small groups before the next stage is added. Class-wide discussion takes place after every group has independently discussed each stage.

**Execution:**

> Step 1:  You are on a team of three (a female Captain and two enlisted males) and you notice that every time the Captain asks a question, the response is given (and the eye contact) to the two enlisted males.

> Step 2:  The vendor suggests you purchase ingredients for the famous *bastila* recipe that Moroccans enjoy which features a specialty bird – a plump and flavorful pigeon in between layers of filo dough with nuts and cinnamon and powdered sugar on top.

> Step 3:  You get the feeling that your vendor is taking an opportunity to pad the bill for your American team because America is rich and why shouldn't he take advantage?

> Step 4:  After the vendor finds out you are assisting with humanitarian relief, he offers to give you a sizeable discount. **Wrap-up:**  With the entire class, ask for responses about:  what the Captain was doing wrong; what about that famous *bastila*; should Americans pay more or less?  Discussion should include an indication that in Morocco, some males only feel comfortable shaking hands or engaging with other males, not always, but in more conservative areas. The *bastila* is a national dish and showing respect for the pride in wanting to share with the Americans, possibly a diplomatic suggestion of making the recipe with chicken, was an option discussed. Americans shouldn't pay more, and it would take an astute officer to recognize appropriate price ranges, yet it isn't appropriate to underpay either, and typically a bargain on something means the vendor will make it up somewhere else. Being diplomatic and gracious is key to continuing harmonious relations. At this point, the instructor can ask if there are any other questions about the products, practices or perspectives of Morocco and adds input regarding other cultural reflections which weren't brought out in the class discussion.

**Reflective statement:** The class had the benefit of two instructors who had spent time in Morocco, as well as other Middle Eastern countries, so the additional input generated other questions about the products, practices, and perspectives and the discussion continued longer than the allotted time. The groups produce all or part of this scenario in French (or Arabic) according to their level of language expertise and time spent introducing key vocabulary.

*Scenario 4:  Portuguese (novice), The Brazilian Office*

**Goal:** To help students develop leadership skills by experiencing cultural differences and comparing them to their own culture. (Standards: 1.3, 2.1, 4.2).

**Set-up:** The students are paired up and given the situation that they will prepare to role-play. Each student practices his/her role and presents it to the class in Portuguese.

**Execution:**  Students act out their roles as if they were in Brazil and in a theater-like setting. One of the students will be the Brazilian employee and the other student will play the role of the American student in Brazil participating in a language immersion

program. The students will prepare the classroom as if it were an office.

**The situation:** You are in Brazil on a language immersion or semester abroad program. You realize that you have lost your university identification card and need a replacement. As you arrive at the identity card office, you notice there is one employee and several students that are waiting to get their identity cards processed. You are instructed to take a number and wait your turn. However, as you wait, the young lady working in the office is having a lovely and long conversation on the phone with her boyfriend. After almost 30 minutes on the phone, someone she knows walks in, and she immediately decides to attend to him, totally ignoring the other people in the room, including you. What is your reaction?

Here are some questions for students to ponder as they prepare to discuss/act out this situation. Be creative and expand on these prompts.
1.  What will you do?  Will you confront her and complain about the situation?
2.  Will you report her to her supervisor?
3.  Or, you will just wait for your turn to get your card and leave?
4.  How would you compare this situation to the U.S.? Would something like this happen in the U.S.? Explain.

**Assessment:** The students were graded on creativeness, preparation and organization, and pronunciation during the role-play. Other elements of the evaluation included students' clearly demonstrated cultural perspectives and respect toward other cultures.

**Reflective statement:** The outcomes of this scenario were as varied as the different perspectives and different reactions from the students. Some of the student responses were mature, constructive, and appropriate, while others were not appropriate.  It was evident that students need to learn and practice leadership skills in a different cultural setting. Finally, the scenario gave the students the ability to experience cultural comparisons and draw conclusions.

*Scenario 5:  Portuguese (intermediate), Dressing Etiquette in Brazil*

**Goal:** To provide students an understanding of the role of culture and language when communicating, making decisions, and exercising their influence in a global context (Standards: 1.1, 1.3, 2.1, 4.2).

**Set-up:** This cultural scenario (in English) is presented to the entire class. It is then presented in Portuguese highlighting new vocabulary. You are in Brazil and you need to extend your visa.  You looked on the Internet to determine what you need to do and discover you have to go to a Federal Police *(Polícia Federal)* office. It is very hot. You decide to wear shorts and flip-flops. At the entrance of the building, a Federal Police employee stops you and denies you entry to the building because you are not wearing pants. The hotel where you are staying is far away. You won't be able to be back in time to complete your business. This annoys you. What do you do?

**Execution:** First, the students are divided in groups of four and then instructed to discuss the topic in the language indicated by the instructor. Students have to express their opinion and be able to defend their point of view to the other students in the

group.

Next, there is a discussion with the entire class. They are encouraged to approach the situation as leaders. At this moment, they shift from the personal to the leadership role. They are to think not as an individual, but as someone in a leadership position whose action can have a powerful result – good or bad. To make this point, the following question is posed: "What are the implications of your behavior as a leader in this situation?"

Once they have been able to make this connection, they are instructed to move to the third requirement, which consists of a role-play of the situation in Portuguese. Students are paired up and required to write a dialog to present to the class. They are encouraged to present the dialog without notes – if possible. By writing it, students use known structures and vocabulary and also add new vocabulary with a dictionary.

**Assessment:** Students were evaluated on both their culturally appropriate behavior as leaders and their written and oral expression.

**Reflective statement:** The role-play not only helped the students practice orally what they created in writing, but also helped to improve their chances of retaining the language through immediate recycling. Additionally, this role-play provided a valuable lesson to the instructor. First, it provided insight into the variety of perceptions that students hold about culture. Some students were intuitively sensitive and therefore respectful to the new facet of the culture as leaders, while others had a negative reaction. Second, they enjoyed the discussions about the culture, but what really motivated them was the role-play. They were equally enthusiastic to learn new vocabulary so they could "embellish" their presentation.

*Scenario 6:  Russian (novice), Presentations on Russian-speaking Regions and Cultures*

**Goals:** To provide students an opportunity to demonstrate their speaking skills at the end of their first year of study of the Russian language, and also to provide an opportunity to do research on the regional and cultural diversity in Russia and former Soviet Republics. Additionally, this scenario further develops leadership skills such as: initiative, responsibility, critical thinking, effective speaking and active listening skills (Standards: 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 4.2).

**Set-up:** Students choose one of the Russian Federation's regions or former Soviet Republics from the list provided and completes an oral presentation accompanied by a short slide show.  Part one consists of a three-minute minimum introduction in Russian that includes the following topics: a complete description of the region, including location, language, population, major cities and other attractions, educational system, and natural resources. Part two lasts about seven minutes and covers the following topics *in English:* regional history and importance, governmental structure, cultural aspects and traditions. Students are required to cite at least two different resources for the written portion of this project. No more than one student in the same class presented the same region.

**Execution:** Students elected their region of interest from a lengthy list (e.g., Ukraine and Ukrainians; Belarus and Belarusians; Azerbaijan and Azeri; Kirgizstan and Kirghizs) and prepared their presentations. Once prepared, they gave their presenta-

tions with varying degrees of success (please see Reflection for further explanation).

**Assessment:** Both presentational and written components were evaluated based on how thoroughly the topics were covered, and quantity and quality of effort and independent research. Russian language skills were evaluated separately based on grammatical accuracy, use of new vocabulary, and the content and relevance of the information presented in the Russian introduction.

**Reflective statement:** As students elected what region to present according to their interests, background or just randomly, they encountered different kinds of problems preparing for their presentations. It was evident that if they relied on help from friends or peers, their presentation came out more subjective and emotionally colored than others who researched the region over the Internet and gathered factual material. At the same time, students tended to organize the material according to their own interests and preferences. For example, some of them talked about dancing, music, sports, traditional food or costumes and included a short video. That actually made their presentations unique and special. Many students chose to ask their instructor to check their written Russian texts before the presentation. It helped them minimize mistakes in pronunciation and grammar use and feel more confident in class. Many students showed an interest in each other's regions and asked follow-up questions (nature, traditions, military, etc.), making the discussions more interesting and lively.

Overall, the presentations were thorough and demonstrated good oratory and leadership skills as well as creativity. For all of them it was the first experience to speak in the target language in front of the audience for a few minutes, and some felt nervous and uncomfortable but were bolstered by their classmates.

*Scenario 7: Spanish (any level), Multi-national situations (Argentina, Spain, Japan and Afghanistan): What would you do?*

**Goal:** To provide students an opportunity to develop leadership skills by emphasizing multi-national/multi-cultural awareness and cooperation in a variety of contexts. Using four different transnational situations, students are to identify cultural differences and compare them to their own culture. Students explore how cultural factors may influence better leadership decisions and actions. In Phase I of this project, cadets/learners requested more multi-national experiences in their language classes [beyond the target language/culture(s)] (Standards: 1.1, 1.3, 2.1, 4.2).

**Set-up:** Students are divided in groups and given a different situation per group. Students are instructed to discuss the situations and to develop a group response in the target language for their specific situation.

**Execution:** Each group was given 12 minutes to discuss the situation internally and develop a collective response in Spanish. They were instructed to consider the following questions:

    a.   How are their perceptions (of the situation) different than your perceptions?

    b.   Do different cultures have different moral codes?

    c.   Is "When in Rome do like the Romans" a proper path to follow?

d.   What would you do in the situation presented to you?

Situation 1: You are a Lieutenant escorting four students on an Argentinian Air Force Academy visit and while there, you notice that the personnel, including the officers that are driving you around, are not in a rush despite the specific agenda you were given on the first day. Perhaps they are trying to maintain a relaxed atmosphere for their guests, or they have standards but don't enforce them, or it's simply part of the culture. Should you join the bandwagon?  Later, you have a dinner appointment for a gift exchange and your students are asking you to relax and let them enjoy their last night. You are an officer that needs to model appropriate behavior to the officers in training. What would you do and why?

Situation 2: You are a Captain visiting the Air Force Academy in Spain. You notice that the Major that is escorting you, el Comandante Juan Descarado, is very friendly with the junior officers in his unit. In fact, he tells you that he plays tennis every Saturday morning with Lieutenant Anita Inocente de Castilla, a new officer in the unit, and then takes her to lunch. Moreover, he tells you that the Spanish culture is very warm and welcoming and that it's a matter of custom for officers to have a casual meal together. It's now Friday night, el Comandante Descarado has invited you to play tennis Saturday morning. He said he would pair you up with Lieutenant Asustada, another officer in his unit. What would you do and why?  It is now Saturday and el Comandante Descarado invites you to either go to a restaurant for dinner or to go out to the dance club and/or binge drinking with the new female Lieutenants. What would you do and why?

Situation 3: You are a student/cadet visiting the Japanese Air Force Academy, and it is Japanese custom to bow as a form of formal salute. But you are an American, very proud of your customs and culture. Should you bow to them as well or stand up proud offering a handshake instead. What would you do and why?  You are now having a formal dinner with representatives of the Japanese government and members of the press, and they ask you to provide your thoughts on the attack on Pearl Harbor and the atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What would you do and why?

Situation 4: You are a Captain assigned to a special operations Province Reconstruction Team working with the newly formed but fledgling Afghani Air Force in the remote, tribal areas near the border with Pakistan. Local customs require visitors to leave their weapons outside the tent, remove their shoes, and drink tea with the locals as they warm up to each other and begin conversations about the economy, the Taliban, the allies and what your team can do for them.  What would you do and why?

Students were given 5 minutes per group to present their responses to the scenarios in the target language in front of the class, followed by the instructors' comments or observations and class discussion.

**Assessment:** This exercise was conducted by nine instructors in 13 Introductory

Spanish classes. Students were not formally assessed; however, the instructors guided the resulting discussion and provided feedback to ensure the exercise objectives were met. During the discussion, feedback from the students indicated they felt that language courses at the Academy should include more cultural leadership discussions; that knowing languages and cultures helps produce better leaders; and that leadership and culture are not mutually exclusive ideas or constructs.

**Reflective statement:** This exercise served to develop cultural awareness that is an essential component of global leadership expertise. The situations were intentionally crafted to get cadets out of their comfort zones. This activity served to establish a more visible link between the language learning environment and the development of leadership skills.

# 2

# Learning in Parallel: Using Parallel Corpora to Enhance Written Language Acquisition at the Beginning Level

**Brody Bluemel**
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*Abstract*

*This article illustrates the pedagogical value of incorporating parallel corpora in foreign language education. It explores the development of a Chinese/English parallel corpus designed specifically for pedagogical application. The corpus tool was created to aid language learners in reading comprehension and writing development by making foreign language texts more accessible to them. The study follows the application of this parallel corpus in two beginning level high school Chinese classes and describes the experience of both instructor and students in implementing this technology. The positive learning outcomes observed through students improvement in comprehension and composition demonstrate the value of parallel corpora both as a pedagogical tool and innovative technology.*

## Background

Written language acquisition, as with all aspects of language learning, presents learners with many unique challenges. One of the primary struggles of written language acquisition is the problem of reading comprehension, particularly at the beginning level. Language learners are often limited in the selections of texts that are accessible to them, both physically and intellectually, as they strive to develop their reading and writing skills. Additionally, learners often struggle with sentence composition, especially when learning to use lexical items and grammatical structures that have multiple meanings and/or uses. These challenges can be observed among learners of any foreign language (FL), but are acutely transparent with learners of Chinese. The extensive number and relative complexity of individual Chinese characters, as well as the associated tonal pronunciation, among other features, create several obstacles that learners must face in studying the Chinese orthographic system (Norman, 1988). The current article demonstrates how these challenges can be addressed through the use of parallel corpus technology.

In recent years corpora have evolved into a more accepted and valued tool for both research and FL pedagogy. The continued expansion of corpus research has led to the development of many specialized corpora, and to diverse applications in using this technology. A more recent outgrowth of corpus research is the use of parallel corpora. Although parallel corpora have been used for over two decades in transla-

tion studies and comparative language research, their application in FL pedagogy is a more recent trend (McEnery & Xiao, 2008). Studies suggest the apparent potential pedagogical value of parallel corpora (Fan & Xu, 2002; Johansson, 2009; Wang, 2001). The research presented in this article builds upon these studies by demonstrating how parallel corpora can be incorporated in the classroom, focusing on the beginning level of language learning.

In the present study, the researcher analyzed the application of a specialized parallel corpus in two beginning level high school Chinese classrooms. The corpus developed for this study was designed specifically as a pedagogical tool to help students develop their reading and writing ability in learning Chinese as a FL. The researcher created the Parallel Corpus Teaching Tool with assistance from a third party programmer. After reviewing several pedagogical studies using parallel corpora, the author describes the Parallel Corpus Teaching Tool, accessible at <www.parallelcorpus.com>. A detailed account is then given of how this corpus tool was incorporated into a high school Chinese FL classroom, and accounts for some of the struggles and the successes observed in adapting this parallel corpus in a beginning level FL class. The article explores the potential for pedagogical applications of parallel corpora, and discusses both the advantages and challenges of incorporating this technology in the classroom.

**Literature Review**

Over the past several decades parallel corpus technology has had a defined presence in translation studies and comparative language research, but its application has been noticeably absent from language pedagogy. Before exploring why this has been the case, it is first necessary to understand what exactly parallel corpora are. Parallel corpora are sometimes referred to as *multilingual corpora*, *bilingual corpora*, *translation corpora*, *comparable corpora*, or *equivalent corpora*. These many terms are occasionally used interchangeably, however, McEnery and Xiao (2008) provide a clear distinction among them by noting that translation corpora is the umbrella term that is then divided into three categories: parallel corpora, comparable corpora, and equivalent corpora. Parallel corpora are composed of source texts and their translations in one or more additional languages. Comparable corpora are two comparable monolingual sub-corpora that are designed using the same sampling frame. In other words, comparable corpora do not include translations but are composed of similar texts in two or more languages. Equivalent corpora are a combination of the first two categories (i.e. parallel and comparable corpora). The terms bilingual or multilingual corpora are simply used to distinguish the number of languages included in a translation corpus. Parallel corpora are the apparent subcategory of translation corpora considered in the current analysis.

Parallel corpora are constructed using either unidirectional, bidirectional, or multidirectional source texts. The unidirectional design includes original source texts from one language, and translations in the other (e.g. ,English source texts / Chinese translations *or* Chinese source texts / English translations). Bidirectional parallel corpora include a balance of source texts from both languages and their translations (e.g., English source texts/ Chinese translations *and* Chinese source / English translations). Multidirectional parallel corpora are multilingual corpora that

include the same piece of writing in numerous languages (e.g., the same article in Chinese, English, and German) (McEnery & Xiao, 2008). Each of these separate designs is best suited for different objectives and functions, and should be taken into account when using parallel corpora.

One final element to highlight is the necessity of textual alignment. The two (or more) textual versions of any text included in a parallel corpus (the original text and translation) are aligned in order to link the corresponding texts together. This alignment can be accomplished using phrasal alignment, sentential alignment, or context-based alignment (Biçici, 2008). Phrasal alignment links set phrases in the corresponding languages together, often at the word level. Sentential alignment links the two translations together in sentence segments. Context-based alignment requires several steps of machine processing in order to determine contextual phrases in the two languages, and then links the corpora together based upon the concept or idea being expressed (Biçici, 2008). Consideration of alignment method becomes important when considering how parallel corpora are used in pedagogy, as the different levels of alignment may require greater negotiation on the part of the parallel corpus user/language learner. After considering all these important characteristics of parallel corpora, a parallel corpus can be concisely defined as a bilingual or multilingual body of aligned corpus texts, consisting of source texts in one language and corresponding translated texts in one or more additional languages.

With a clear understanding of what parallel corpora are, the value of their use in translation and comparative language studies is evident. The application of parallel corpora in pedagogy has not always been so intuitive, but with advancements in technology and user-friendly corpus interfaces, the untapped potential of parallel corpora has recently begun to rise to the forefront. The limited number of studies that have been conducted provide foundational evidence of the value of parallel corpora in pedagogy, but also highlight the need for additional classroom applications and continued research (Fan & Xu, 2002; Johansson, 2009; Laviosa, 2002; Wang, 2001).

Previous studies have shown the potential for applying parallel corpora to FL classrooms. For example, Laviosa (2002) reported that navigation of a parallel corpus "reveals precisely the information that the learner needs to acquire in order to establish mental links between first language (L1) and second language (L2) schemas and create new L2 schemas when there is not reciprocity between the two language" (p.110). Laviosa's statement is substantiated by Tsai and Choi's (2005) study of lexical development among English L1 Chinese language learners. Their study analyzed the lexical acquisition and retention of American learners of Chinese using parallel corpus concordances to learn new vocabulary items in comparison with a control group who were presented with the same material in a traditional format (i.e., textbook, dictionary). The corpus-based group had a greater observed level of acquisition and retention of the tested lexical items in analyzing pre- and posttest results. More notably, though, they demonstrated a functional understanding of lexical terms with complex and/or multiple meanings as assessed by their ability to use new terms correctly in multiple contexts in which the meaning and form of the lexical item varied.

Frankenberg-Garcia (2005) provides further insight to Tsai and Choi's findings in the specific context of reading comprehension. "When reading in a foreign language, L2-L1 parallel concordances can help learners to understand foreign words,

meanings and grammar that they are unfamiliar with [… and] boost language comprehension" (ibid, p. 194). In support of this claim she details the experience of a Portuguese learner of English in understanding the *no matter how* meaning of the word *however* in the sentence *No programme, however good, can replace the role of the teacher.* The student had difficulty comprehending this usage of *however,* but the parallel corpus enabled him to conceptualize the meaning in his L1. These implications are also observed in Fan and Xu's (2002) study that had students use a Chinese/English parallel corpus of legal documents to answer comprehension questions. Their study not only supports Frankenberg-Garcia's assertions, but also reported that the students actually preferred using the parallel corpus as opposed to other means. These studies demonstrate the unique role parallel corpora can play as a tool for learners grappling with complex structures, terms, and concepts by helping them to conceptualize these complex items in their native language.

An additional study by Xu and Kawecki (2005) provides interesting insight into the diverse potential for pedagogical applications of parallel corpora. These researchers used an aligned Chinese/English/French trilingual parallel corpus in a French FL class. Their study took place in a Hong Kong University with a classroom composed of Chinese L1 learners with high proficiency in L2 English. The learners used the corpus to derive meaning and use of new lexical items in French by comparing the French terms with the English and Chinese counterparts and contrasting their form and function. Findings showed that the use of the trilingual corpus enabled students to draw upon their knowledge of both their L1 and L2 when learning a third language. The authors concluded that the trilingual parallel corpus aided students' comprehension of linguistic concepts that are often pragmatically and semantically challenging.

Several other studies have also shown similar successful applications of parallel corpora in the FL classroom (Fan & Xu, 2002; Frankenberg-Garcia, 2000; 2005; St. John, 2001). This line of research has clearly established the pedagogical value of parallel corpora for FL learning. Though parallel corpora evidently have their place in the classroom, the primary limitation that currently impedes their application is the underdevelopment of this resource. There are relatively few parallel corpora available for use, and of those that are available, many have been developed for linguistics research and not necessarily as pedagogical tools accessible to students. For example, a review of the available corpora indicates that there are two Chinese/English parallel corpora accessible without download and software: *The Babel English-Chinese Parallel Corpus* and *E-C Concord.* While both corpora are valuable resources, they require some metalinguistic knowledge in order to best maneuver their interfaces. This limitation emphasizes the need for further application and development of parallel corpora, but likewise implies the importance of careful corpus and research design in developing new corpora and in creative planning in pedagogical applications of extant corpora.

## Parallel Corpora in the Classroom

The research presented in this article answers calls for the development of new parallel corpus tools and research on their application(s) in the FL classroom. For this project a new Chinese/English parallel corpus was designed and constructed

specifically for the purpose of language learning. The primary aim in creating this parallel corpus tool was to develop a resource that would make written texts more accessible to language learners, and improve upon current approaches to written language instruction. As previously mentioned, L2 learners face two challenging tasks in written language acquisition: namely, reading comprehension and sentence composition and construction. These tasks are particularly difficult to address at beginning levels of language learning because learners may not have developed adequate vocabulary or functional knowledge of the language. The parallel corpus tool designed for this project addresses these and other tasks of language development by making written language more accessible to language learners at all levels.

While reading comprehension and writing development in any FL can be challenging, the unique and complex structure of written Chinese presents learners with additional obstacles. The Chinese orthographic system is composed of thousands of individual characters, with estimates suggesting that an individual must know 3,000–4,000 characters in order to read general texts such as newspapers (Norman, 1988). The large amount of characters that one needs to acquire makes learning written Chinese especially challenging for beginners since the Chinese writing system is not based on an alphabet, and students cannot simply sound out words or phrases. In alphabetically based languages, learners can sound out words and read through entire documents after mastering the alphabet associated with the language. This provides learners with the benefit of aural recognition as well as context to derive the meaning of unknown terms or phrases and to decipher textual meaning. Though being able to read through a document and understand it are two different things, it is important to remember that learners of Chinese face additional obstacles before even being able to read through a text. Consequently, Chinese language learners have less access to contextual information and/or the ability to draw on aural recognition when encountering new texts than do learners of alphabetic languages.

Another unique feature of Chinese is the composition of words. A Chinese word can be composed of one, two, or even more characters, and many characters can have several meanings. For example the character 会 (*huì*) generally means *to be able to*, but has additional uses. It can also be combined with other characters to form two-character words such as 社会 (*shèhuì*), which means *society*. Though the same character 会 (*huì*) appears in both words, the two words have very different meanings and function differently within sentences. So an individual who had learned the word 会 (*huì*) but not 社会 (*shèhuì*) would be easily confused and likely completely misunderstand a text that contained the latter term. This polysemic feature of many Chinese characters presents learners with several challenges. At one level, simply confusing word order within a sentence could result in an alternate meaning being expressed in the text. At another level, remaining unaware of multiple meanings and functions of terms greatly limits a learner's ability to effectively function and communicate within a FL.

These inherent challenges to learning Chinese orthography are specifically addressed and made more accessible through the use of parallel corpus technology. These specific benefits of parallel corpus technology add to the already established claim that using parallel corpora in language teaching enable students to conceptualize the target language through schemas in their L1. The corpus tool designed for

this study improves upon this inherent characteristic of parallel corpora by including added features that enable learners to read through Chinese texts fluidly, and not be limited by the characters they may not know yet. This allows individuals to not only benefit from aural recognition and context clues, but it also makes more advanced texts accessible to learners. Additionally, parallel corpora also provide learners with an efficient method for addressing the challenge of polysemy and multiple functions of characters. Corpora, in general, work well in addressing polysemy, but parallel corpora assist learners in more readily comprehending concepts through their first language. Again, it is because learners are able to explicitly link polysemous terms and complex constructs in the target language with the conceptual meaning expressed in the aligned L1 text.

When designing the parallel corpus tool for learners, addressing the aforementioned challenges of acquiring written Chinese needs to be the primary focus, with the ultimate goals of enhancing current methods for approaching Chinese reading and writing and making written texts more accessible to learners. Two key research questions that address pedagogical implementation and learner experience guided this study:

1.  How do the students and instructor use the tool?

2.  How effective is the parallel corpus tool in aiding students' acquisition of written Chinese?

**The Development of the Parallel Corpus Tool Design**

The Parallel Corpus Teaching Tool (Bluemel, 2013) used in this study was designed specifically for pedagogical application in the FL classroom setting. The creation of a new corpus tool, instead of adapting an extant one, was pursued for several reasons. First, the need for more and better-developed parallel corpora has already been established (Fan & Xu, 2002; Johansson, 2009; Laviosa, 2002; Wang, 2001). Second, developing a new corpus tool allowed for innovative functions that more precisely address the challenges of Chinese orthography. Third, research has demonstrated that designing a parallel corpus specifically for pedagogy improves students learning experience by allowing for an interface that is more accessible and easier to integrate into the curriculum (Lavid, Hita, & Zamorano-Mansilla, 2010). As previously mentioned, the majority of parallel corpora currently available have been created for linguistics research, without considering the possibility of pedagogical application. The design and features of the Chinese/English parallel corpus created for this study were greatly influenced by the intent for the pedagogical application of the tool.

Xu and Kawecki's (2005) study using a trilingual English/Chinese/French parallel corpus suggests the value of presenting parallel corpora in more than just the standard bilingual format. Though the parallel corpus tool created for this study is bilingual (Chinese/English), it includes texts in four language formats: Chinese characters, Chinese characters + tone marks, pinyin, and English. Just as the students in Xu and Kawecki's (2005) research were able to use both English and Chinese in learning concepts in French, the design of the Parallel Corpus Teaching Tool enables

students to use tone marks, pinyin, and English as aids in learning Chinese characters. In order to realize the significance of this design structure, it is necessary to first consider some basic elements of Chinese.

Though Chinese is written using characters, a corresponding system known as pinyin has become the standard writing system for transliterating Chinese characters by using the Roman alphabet. It is used both by FL learners of Chinese as well as native speakers of the language. The pinyin system allows for the alphabetic representation of characters, which can aid in reading, understanding, and typing Chinese. Another pertinent feature of Chinese orthography is that, generally, each character corresponds to one syllable, and every syllable/character has a tone mark. Chinese is a tonal language, and the tone associated with each syllable/character functions to indicate the meaning. Mandarin Chinese has four tones, plus a fifth neutral tone, making it possible for a syllabic utterance such as *ma,* to have five different possible meanings based upon the tone. It is therefore imperative that utterances in Chinese are spoken with the correct tone, and that students learn the correct tones associated with characters and meanings of words.

To aid in the mastery of tones, tone marks are used as part of the pinyin system to clearly demarcate tone. Tone marks appear in two forms, either as numbers following a syllable or, more typically, as diacritics written above the syllable, as illustrated in Table 1. In studying Chinese, learners typically begin by first learning the pinyin system and tone marks before moving onto characters.

**Table 1**

*Tone Marks in Mandarin Chinese.*

| Tone | Tone indicated by Number | Tone indicated by Diacritic |
|---|---|---|
| 1st Tone | ma1 | mā |
| 2nd Tone | ma2 | má |
| 3rd Tone | ma3 | mǎ |
| 4th Tone | ma4 | mà |
| Neutral Tone | ma | ma |

As the parallel corpus tool was designed, the function of pinyin and tone marks in learning written Chinese was integrated into the tool by aligning texts in four language formats: Chinese characters, Chinese characters + tone marks, pinyin, and English. Figure 1 depicts these four different formats. The Chinese character and English formats lie at opposite ends of the spectrum, and require little discussion as they simply represent the two languages. The character + tone marks and pinyin formats function as a form of *learner language* to assist learners in the acquisition of characters. While the pinyin representation of any character is available in most Chinese language technologies, the Character + tone mark format is a novel approach, which, to the researcher's knowledge has not been previously implemented elsewhere. These two additional formats specifically address the challenges learners face in being able to read complete texts, and are illustrated below.

*Figure 1*

| Chinese Character | Chinese Character + Tone Mark | Pinyin | English |
|---|---|---|---|
| 马 | 马̌ | mǎ | horse |

Though the texts are aligned in all four of the language formats, students are able to select which formats are visible. The goal is for students to use the least amount of mediation necessary to read and understand texts. Ideally, they would be able to read the Chinese characters, but if additional information is needed, they can then add tone marks to help with pronunciation. Thus the tool aids learners in written language acquisition by enabling them to comprehend texts by using additional formats as necessary, but also places an emphasis on character acquisition by presenting learners first with just the characters. This contrasts with a majority of beginning level learning materials that always juxtapose characters with pinyin, enabling students to completely ignore characters. In using the parallel corpus, learners can click on a character to add pinyin, but the primary focus in on character acquisition, only making pinyin visible as needed. Last, the English translation is also available for words or characters they are not able derive the meaning of using the other three textual formats.

The aim of this aspect of the design was to provide a learning environment in which students focus on character acquisition, and tone marks and pinyin are used as a form of interlanguage to assist them in the ultimate goal of learning characters. Systematically, the corpus did not have a tool that forced learners to use the tool in this manner, but classroom instruction on proper usage as well as screen-recordings of students' use of the tool ensured its application for the intended purpose. The corpus enabled allowed users to view entire texts, or they could also query a specific term or phrase using Chinese characters, pinyin, and/or English. A character input system was necessary to search for Chinese characters, whereas the tool included a feature that not only enabled, but also required, students to input the correct tone mark in order to search for the pinyin. When a student types a pinyin letter that could possibly contain a diacritic, the possible options appear on the screen and require the student to select the correct one.

The approach to compiling texts into the digital parallel corpus tool is also somewhat unconventional, and again intended to maximize the pedagogical value of the tool. The corpus is composed of bidirectional texts (Chinese L1 to English L2 translations *and* English L1 to Chinese L2 translations) that are functionally accessible to students, meaning the students are familiar with the content addressed in the included texts. The texts included in the corpora were selected according to two criteria: 1) the content of the texts related to the content covered in the course curriculum, and 2) the texts were challenging in that students did not necessarily know all words or characters, but appropriate for students' language level. The basic set of texts included the students' textbook, *Learn Chinese with Me* (Chen, 2009) along with several supplementary articles and books, which were selected by the in-

structor. The supplementary texts used in the corpus included bilingual short stories (Hou, 2006; White, 2004), bilingual textbook articles (The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c), bilingual published speeches (Xu, 2011), and bilingual online articles (National Foreign Language Center, 2010).

While only a small subset of texts was initially made accessible through the corpus tool, the course instructor was able to add, change, or alter source texts throughout the semester. This means that the corpus size was continually expanding, and by the end of the research period the corpus contained 45 texts aligned in Chinese and English, of which approximately 18 were from the textbook and the remaining were from the selected supplementary articles and books. These 45 texts contained 26,563 words [6,512 Chinese words or tokens (11,039 Chinese characters) - 6,512 Chinese characters + tone mark tokens, 6,512 pinyin tokens, and 7,057 English tokens). By enabling the instructor to control the data that students are able to access, the goal is not to limit their exposure, but rather to insure that students are able to access material that is consistent with their learning level and with the content being covered in class. By doing so, the instructor can add more challenging texts as more vocabulary is learned throughout the semester, and hopefully provide texts that continue to challenge students in their development. This included adding texts that contained new lexical items as well as gradually adding texts of greater length.

All texts used in the corpus were aligned at both the word and the sentence level. These two levels of alignment allow for different functions within the tool. First, the word alignment allows students to search for words, and have the corresponding translation equivalents highlighted in the corresponding text formats (See Figure 2). The figure depicts the search term 马 with its corresponding pinyin *mǎ* and English *horse* all highlighted in green in the text. Additionally, an interactive feature of the tool allows the student to view the text in the character with tone mark format after clicking on the Chinese character. Next, the sentence level alignment was chosen for two reasons. First, the fluidity of text sources required a more standardized system of alignment. Second, the sentence alignment forces students to analyze the structure of the entire sentence, and observe how the two languages differ grammatically. By having both word-level and sentence-level alignment students are also able to identify specific terms and then compare how those terms function within the two different languages.

**Figure 2**

**Methods**

*Participants*

    The study of the application of the parallel corpus took place in a Chinese FL course in an American high school. The participants (*N* = 15) in the study were all beginning level high school students (grades 9-12) enrolled in a second-semester Chinese class. They were between 15 and 18 years of age. The participants came from two different classes and did not include heritage learners. Students had three hours of classroom interaction each week as well as having a one-hour Chinese culture class each week. The first class had four students and the second eleven. All students participated in the study and the same instructor taught both classes.

*The Study*

    This research took place over a three-month period in which all participants in both classes received the same treatment. During the first month of the study, the class continued unaltered, but with participant data (assignments, exams, etc.) being collected. Assignments were completed every other class period (once or twice per week), and there was an exam administered approximately every two weeks. The parallel corpus tool was introduced at the beginning of the second month of the study. At this time, participants were taught how to use the tool and encouraged, but not required, to use it in their study and class work as a resource for looking up new lexical items as well as examples of sentence construction. By the beginning of the third month of the study, the tool was completely integrated into the classroom as a regular part of participant activity used during all exams and for all in-class assignments. Participants had continual access to the parallel corpus tool during class time, and were encouraged to use it as needed even if the focus of the class did not specifically require its use.

    Several varied data sources were collected to analyze the pedagogical implementation of the tool and the learners' experience. First, all course assignments and projects were gathered during the duration of the three-month study. Participants' performance on the assigned tasks and projects were used to assess and analyze performance in reading, writing, and lexical acquisition. Additionally, the participants' use of the corpus tool in completing projects and exams in the classroom was recorded using screen-capture software in order to examine exactly how participants applied the tool. All subjects were also required to keep learner logs as part of the course curriculum. These learner logs were completed with each assignment as well as with all exams and other projects. The logs provided details on how the tool was used for each individual assignment, and gave insight into the individual learner's experience in using the tool. Last, the instructor maintained an autoethnography throughout the semester, which details how he implemented and used the tool. At the end of the research period, participants also completed a brief questionnaire in which they evaluated the tool and gave written feedback on their experience.

    As stated, learners were assessed through a series of assigned tasks and unit projects. The participants were asked to complete several assignments throughout the semester. These tasks were given both as in-class assignments and as homework assignments. The assignments included lexical acquisition tasks, reading compre-

hension tasks, as well as writing tasks. For example, after learning Chinese kinship terms, the participants used the parallel corpus tool to read a letter in which the author, Xiūmíng, described the members of his family. The letter included many of the new vocabulary terms recently covered in class and additional unfamiliar terms. In addition to reading and explaining the meaning of the letter through a written prompt, participants were asked to identify new lexical items and then search those items in the parallel corpus in order to find additional examples of their use and then describe the meaning of the terms and how they were used. Last, as homework, participants completed a separate writing task in which they had to use the new lexical items they had individually identified in writing a response letter to Xiūmíng by describing their own family. Participants in both classes were given the same assignments. During the first month of the study they completed these tasks without the aid of the parallel corpus tool. In the second month, they had the option of using the tool. In the third month three they were required to use the parallel corpus in completing their in-class assignments and exams.

Screen recordings were also taken of the participants while they completed in-class assignments and exams. *QuickTime* screen-capture software was used to record participants' screens during the unit assessments in order to document exactly how each participant chose to implement the corpus tool in completing their work. These recordings were taken to provide insight into what features of the tool the participants used most frequently, and which features the participants seemed to ignore.

The parallel corpus tool was created as a web-based tool. The website was designed for both computer as well as tablet access. One of the classes used school-issued *iPads*. Both groups had open access to computers, *iPads*, or both during class time, but also had full access to the tool from home. Thus, from the beginning of the second month of the study participants had open access to the parallel corpus tool.

**Findings**

With regard to the first research question about how the participants and instructor used the tool, the integration and application of the parallel corpus in the classroom was not without problem. However, the overall experience of both the instructor and the participants resulted in a very positive learning outcome. Taking the time to allow participants and the instructor to become familiar with the tool during the second month of the study allowed for a fluid adaptation that seemed to encourage both instructor and participants in using the technology. Participants all expressed an overall enthusiasm for the tool as expressed in their evaluations and learner logs, and their learning outcomes suggest reason for the instructor and researchers to share in their enthusiasm.

First, while the pedagogical implementation of the corpus tool proceeded quite smoothly, there were a couple of issues that arose. The instructor's autoethnography detailed how adapting the parallel corpus tool did require a couple additional hours of work each week in both preparing and designing lesson plans as well as in finding and preparing text sources for the parallel corpus tool. Specifically, lesson plans had to be restructured in order to incorporate the content and activities that were added using the parallel corpus. The greatest amount of preparation time was spent

in finding and preparing text sources to be added to the parallel corpus tool, as this required additional effort beyond the already established lesson plans. On average, each added text took approximately two hours to format and upload to the corpus database. Additionally, two different class periods had to be dedicated to teaching the participants to use the corpus tool. The instructor, though, reported that this extra effort and time was worth the effort due to the positive participant response and learning outcomes.

One of the challenges that arose in implementing the tool derived from its web-based interface. On two separate occasions the school's Internet service went down during the class. On both occasions the instructor delayed the planned lesson material – which required the use of the corpus tool – and did alternative interactive speaking/listening activities. This was particularly challenging the second time this happened as it was during an exam time, in which the participants were required to use the parallel corpus in completing an essay. Though the effect of these incidences was relatively minor, it does suggest a limitation of adapting technology based upon the quality of both the hardware and technology systems available.

Despite these challenges, the instructor was motivated to continue using the tool based on the effects he was observing among participants as they used it. Initially, the participants showed enthusiasm simply by the ability to use technology in the class-room. All of the participants were very familiar and comfortable with using technology, and were motivated by the ability to use it in studying Chinese. During the second month of the study, after the parallel corpus was introduced, nine of the 11 participants' homework assignments had notably improved. The writing responses were longer and better developed than in previous assignments, and included sentences with more complex grammatical structures. These outcomes will be discussed in greater detail shortly after first considering all data sources collected during the study.

*Learner logs*

In reviewing participants' learner logs there was an apparent consistency in participants reporting on their enthusiasm for the corpus tool, and reporting more time spent on their homework using the tool. While the increased enthusiasm cannot be attributed inherently to the parallel corpus, it can be attributed, and was explicitly so by participants, to the adaptation of technology. The use of technology appeared to boost their motivation for Chinese learning, and participant motivation remained relatively constant throughout the remainder of the study as detailed in their explicit responses in their learner logs.

*Screen recordings*

While this general observation of the participants' implementation of the tool was evident through their learning logs, greater insight into how participants chose to use the source is evidenced through the screen-recordings taken during in-class assignments and exams. Figure 3 depicts a screenshot of one participant screen recording taken during an exam, which was very typical of how participants' used the tool during exam periods. In this instance the subject was using the parallel corpus to search for the term 看到 (*kàndào*) which means *to see*. The parallel corpus returns a list of concordances of the term that the participant can use to both observe the meaning of the term and how it is used. Two of the five listings returned are

also shown in Figure 3. Participants were observed using the corpus tool to write answers to exam questions as well as to construct essays. By using the tool in such a manner, they then looked to the corpus texts as models for constructing their own writing. The instructor observed that this led participants away from giving standard textbook-style answers to questions and essays, and articulating more dynamic sentences that were more grammatically complex and expressive.

**Figure 3**

*Qualitative Review Task*

With regard to the second research question about the effectiveness of the parallel corpus tool in aiding students' acquisition of written Chinese, a qualitative analysis of an in-class review task completed immediately after fully implementing the parallel corpus revealed how the corpus tool functioned in aiding the participants' written language acquisition. Before this particular review task, participants had learned the vocabulary for several different animals, and then read a story about the twelve Chinese zodiac animals using the parallel corpus tool. The review assignment required them to identify five new lexical items, describe the meaning and use of these items, and then compose sentences with them. Additionally, participants were asked to identify the 12 zodiac animals and write a brief summary of the story. Finally, they were presented with five images of different animals and then prompted to write a sentence about each image.

The example of one participant, Erin (pseudonym), illustrates the general findings observed in both classes. In first evaluating Erin's review assignment, the ef-

fect of the parallel corpus tool on her development was not explicitly evident. She completed the assignment receiving full marks, demonstrating a clear understanding of both the lexical items being evaluated, as well as evidencing competence of the grammatical structures used in composing both her sentences, and overall summary. While Erin's improvement on this task indicated a stark improvement over comparable previous assignments (in which she averaged 84%), it was not possible to conclude from the assignment score alone that the parallel corpus tool was the variable that aided in her development. However, after then analyzing the screen recording of her use of the tool in completing this task, and considering her self-evaluation in the learner log, it became apparent that the parallel corpus tool was the element that led to her performance improvement. For instance, Erin identified the term 第 (dì) as a new lexical item, and she described the term as meaning "something similar to *the*, but only seems to come before numbers." As observed in the screen recording, Erin derived her meaning of the term by searching the parallel corpus and then evaluating the 12 tokens of use presented in the corpus. After reviewing the tokens of use of the term, she was able to not only provide a definition that showed an understanding of the concept and its use, but also to use it correctly in writing her sentence 第一个动物是老鼠 (dì yígè dòngwù shì lǎoshǔ) which translates as *the first animal was the rat*.

A similar observation was made when examining how she composed five sentences describing the images of animals. For the image of the tiger she wrote the following two sentences: 老虎很大。虎听音乐。(*Lǎohǔ hěn dà. Hǔ tīng yīnyuè*), which translates as *The tiger is very big. The tiger listens to music.* While the sentences are simple, and abstract in meaning as she describes the tiger listening to music, this example illustrates two aspects in which the parallel corpus tool aided Erin's conceptual development and understanding. First, she used the term 老虎 (*Lǎohǔ*) to refer to the tiger in the first sentence, and the term 虎 (*Hǔ*) in the second sentence. Both of these terms correctly indicated tiger, one was simply the longer two-character form, and the second was the one character form. While many nouns in Chinese follow this pattern and can be represented by either one or two characters, Erin and the other participants had not yet encountered or been instructed on this point. Erin's screen recording, however, showed her recognition of this distinction in the corpus text by identifying both characters corresponding to the English *tiger*, and then applying this knowledge correctly in her basic sentence construction. Also, it can be noted in this example was her use of the verb-object 听音乐 (*tīng yīnyuè*). This was a new verb phrase that Erin identified separately in the parallel corpus. Erin was observed in her screen recording identifying this phrase in the parallel corpus and then looking up other tokens of its use to derive the meaning. She identified the term and then compared it to the aligned English texts. Then, she used it grammatically correct in composing her own sentence. While the sentence, *the tiger listens to music*, was not a typical sentence one would expect to see when describing a tiger, it was correct. Furthermore, the analysis of the learning episode revealed how Erin was able to use the parallel corpus tool in order to learn a new term and then was able to apply it in creating her own sentence. Erin's example showed how the corpus tool was used to aid participants in learning not only the material covered in the class, but also to acquire additional linguistic knowledge in the process.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to discuss the creation of a new digital corpora tool and examine its effectiveness in a beginning level high school Chinese course. Data from this study suggest that the Parallel Corpus Tool is a worthwhile and effective pedagogical application.

The observation of how the parallel corpus text influenced participant responses may be attributed in part to the nature of the corpus texts themselves. As parallel corpora are composed of source texts plus their translations into another language, translated language undoubtedly has an effect on the participants' learning. Frankenberg-Garcia (2004) points out that "it is well documented in the literature that the language of translation is not the same as language which is not constrained by source texts from another language" (p. 225). The *language of translation* should always be understood as a representation of the meaning expressed in the source language and not as a direct equivalent. While this observation is a reality of translation and therefore an inherent characteristic of parallel corpora, it is undoubtedly a strength that can aid learners in developing their conceptual knowledge of a language, as was observed in the participants' application of the parallel corpus in constructing their written responses.

Translations do not simply expose learners to two linguistic variations of a text, they also provide a written example of how a language expert (translator) chose to represent the meaning of the source text in his/her translation. As Aijmer (2008) observes, "translation is one of the very few cases where speakers evaluate meaning relations between expression not as part of some kind of metalinguistic, philosophical or theoretical reflection, but as a normal kind of linguistic activity" (p. 98). The cognitive decisions made by translators in order to best represent the meaning of a source text in a grammatically appropriate context in a second language provide an ideal model for participants to learn from. Thus, translation texts present learners with a model of a translator's conceptual knowledge of a language, and parallel corpora enable learners to take advantage of this knowledge in developing their own language skills and conceptual understanding. Participants in the current study demonstrated this by composing responses modeled after the parallel corpus texts that used more complex structures and diction than previously witnessed in their work. Though this observation does not prove that participants mastered these concepts, it does demonstrate how parallel corpora can be used to aid in developing these concepts and encouraging participants to become more independent language learners.

Corpora, in general, are important in language learning as they bring students in contact with the types of actual language structure and vocabulary that is encountered in authentic texts and communication. Though the parallel corpus used in this study included the students' textbook, it juxtaposed it with authentic texts, which allowed students to compare *textbook language* with *authentic language.* In other words, corpora expose learners to conceptual knowledge, or conceptual understanding of meaning, from the beginning stages of language learning. Parallel corpora go one step further by then enabling learners to link this conceptual knowledge with established schemas in their first language.

One of the participants in the study articulated this exact sentiment in a learn-

ing log toward the end of the study, noting that after using the corpus tool, she felt like she could actually understand things in Chinese instead of just learning new words. The participant was excited by her realization that, with the aid of the parallel corpus, she could understand concepts and ideas in Chinese. In effect Chinese became a functional language for her for the first time. In this instance, and as observed overall in this study, participants demonstrated an improved level of language comprehension through using the parallel corpus, and as previously discussed the corpus tool evidently assisted them in developing more articulate and meaningful writing in Chinese.

**Future Research Directions**

As a field of research, using parallel corpora as a pedagogical tool remains a blossoming area that currently has more questions than answers. As observed in the current study, parallel corpus technology has the capacity to aid in the learning of specific challenging aspects of the Chinese orthographic system. Each language comes with a unique set of characteristics and anomalies, and a parallel corpus could undoubtedly be similarly adapted to address the issues associated with numerous other languages. There is a great need not only for further research using parallel corpora, but also in the development of additional parallel corpora that are designed specifically with pedagogy in mind.

The pedagogical research applying parallel corpora is also evidently lacking in more specific case studies. It has been demonstrated that parallel corpora can function as a great tool for language learning, but exactly *how* to best apply this technology remains relatively underexplored. Are there specific concepts or constructs that would be made particularly salient to learners through parallel corpora? More content and concept specific research and applications of parallel corpora would greatly inform the research community, but more importantly it would benefit the academic community interested in pursuing this technology in teaching FLs.

**Conclusions**

The primary goal of this article was to investigate the potential value of parallel corpora as a pedagogical tool in FL education, and to discuss the strengths and issues of its application. Prior research has affirmed the practicality and viability of parallel corpora in pedagogy (Johansson, 2009; Wang, 2001; Fan & Xu, 2002), but there remain many unexplored questions in this area of research. The study presented here was one approach to addressing some of the unexplored issues.

The corpus-learning tool described in this study was created specifically for use as a pedagogical tool in teaching Chinese as a FL to English L1 students. The design of this tool sought to address the general areas of reading comprehension and writing development by making Chinese texts more accessible to language learners. Specifically, the challenge of reading and writing associated with character acquisition and correct tonal pronunciation were targeted. As was then observed, this corpus tool aided participants in more efficiently acquiring written Chinese.

The parallel corpus tool was adapted into a beginning level high school Chi-

nese classroom, and effectively aided participants in improving their reading and writing. As noted by one participant, the corpus enabled her to understand concepts *through* Chinese for the first time. This and other observations suggest an overall improvement in participants' written language skill and understanding of texts, leading to the conclusion the parallel corpus was effective in aiding participants' experience in acquiring Chinese. Additionally, consideration of both the instructor and the participants' experiences in implementing the tool into the classroom provides insight into how to effectively incorporate this technology, and what type of challenges can be anticipated. Overall, the parallel corpus tool was observed to be a very effective language-learning tool in addressing challenges of written language.

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# 3

# Student Attitudes and Perceptions of Using Facebook for Language Learning

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*Abstract*

*This research provides insight into Japanese students' perceptions and attitudes of participating in activities through Facebook for language learning. In addition, the authors discuss the overall implications of and potential uses for Facebook in the field of second language learning and teaching. Ninety-seven students from three private universities in Japan participated in this study. A 26-item quantitative questionnaire using a 7-point Likert scale and an open-ended qualitative questionnaire were used in this study. The results showed a small increase in positive attitudes toward most activities for language learning following the completion of the study compared to prior perceptions, but there were mixed attitudes toward using Facebook in an educational environment.*

Web 2.0 technologies and social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook have been widely adopted around the world, led by young adults who populate SNS by constructing their virtual lives and forming social relationships daily (Bumgarner, 2007; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Selwyn, 2007; Stutzman, 2006; Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Chi-Wai Kwok, 2010). The proliferating use of SNS by young adults has not only brought an increased demand for incorporating them into educational endeavors and calls for updated pedagogies, but also significant changes in student learning styles (Lockyer & Patterson, 2008; Mazman & Usluel, 2010; McLoughlin & Lee, 2007; Munoz & Towner, 2009; Omar, Embi, & Yunus, 2012; Selwyn, 2007).

Facebook and other Web 2.0 technologies are powerful digital tools that have a real potential to positively affect student learning (Cook et al., 2008), especially in second language (L2) learning where students are encouraged to become active participants in a learning community (Alm, 2006). In fact, the application of SNS and other Web 2.0 technologies into L2 education has been shown to improve students' overall interest in language learning (Buzzetto-More, 2012; Jones & Shao, 2011; Liou & Peng, 2009; Pinkman, 2005; Shih, 2011; Wang & Vasquez, 2012). The positive outcomes from the previous research conducted have led more language teachers to begin exploring new ways to utilize SNS like Facebook to improve their own teaching methods in order to advance student language learning (Lockyer & Patterson, 2008; Nakatsukasa, 2009).

Facebook was established in 2004 and has grown exponentially to become not only the most popular SNS in the world (Mazman & Usluel, 2010), but also the most prominent social-networking tool of the past decade for students' online learning (Omar, Embi, & Yunus, 2012). According to Facebook, there are over one billion users worldwide (Facebook, 2012) and almost 80% of those users are from outside the United States and Canada (Facebook, 2012). Among the rankings by country, Japan— the location where this study takes place— ranks sixteenth in the world for the total number of Facebook users and fifth among Asian countries.

In this study, the authors looked to advance the knowledge of Web 2.0 technologies for foreign language teaching and learning. The overall goal was to determine whether educators could provide a more rewarding learning experience for their students by incorporating Facebook into regular L2 teaching and learning environments by analyzing student opinions and attitudes. The first objective was to reinforce previous evidence of Facebook's potential in an educational context. The second objective was to help educators identify which specific pedagogical activities used through Facebook are most likely to be well received by students, an area of research that features minimal (no?) publications to date.

## Background

Social constructivism and its related theories focus on individual learning that occurs in response to engaging in group interaction. The origins of these theories are generally attributed to the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky (1978), language is a tool external to the self and used for social interaction, and the learner actively constructs knowledge via these interactions rather than through passively receiving information. Knowledge is at first constructed collaboratively with others in a social context and then acquired by individuals (Von Glasersfeld, 1990). Through collaborative elaboration, learning takes place in meaningful contexts in negotiation and collaboration with others (Bruner, 1999). It is suggested here that SNS technology supports these collaborative contexts for learning more opportunely than ever before. Traditional educational models focused on one-way passive transfers of information from educators to students in the form of lectures and textbooks; social applications provide a flexible space for personalization of learning and increased communication between teachers and students. Additionally, students can participate with each other communicatively and collaboratively in the context of extended interactions and activities that are unrestricted by time and place.

Social constructivist theories combined with an increasing influence of technology in education have promoted the emergence of a new area of research known as computer-supported collaborative learning, which is based on learners sharing in the construction of knowledge using technology as the main avenue of communication. This new discipline focuses on collaborative learning and inherently draws upon theories that emphasize group interaction and co-construction of knowledge such as constructivism, social learning theory, cooperative learning theory, and more recently collaboration theory (Hmelo-Silver, 2006). The rapid development of social media has heightened the interest of researchers from various disciplines looking to understand social software and its impact on learning.

*Facebook's Influence in L2 Learning Contexts*

Although early studies of Facebook focused mainly on its inclusion in a first language (L1) educational environment, some research has investigated how Facebook can be utilized in L2 learning. Numerous studies on Facebook's inclusion in L2 education environments have reported positive influences on student motivation, engagement, and attitudes. Among the studies conducted, Facebook has been shown to have an impact on motivation among students in higher education (Bugeja, 2006; Lampe, Ellison & Steinfield, 2008; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; McCarthy, 2012; O'Sullivan, Hunt, & Lippert, 2004; Promnitz-Hayashi, 2011; Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi (2012); Terantino & Graf, 2011; Yunus & Salehi, 2012; Ziegler, 2007). Most notably, Mazer et al. (2007) suggest that student motivation and participation are greatly enhanced when engaging course material is presented through more personalized platforms, something Facebook and other SNS provide. Similarly, Ziegler (2007) contends that Facebook has the "capacity to better motivate students as engaged learners rather than learners who are primarily passive observers of the educational process" (p. 69). Yunus and Salehi's (2012) study also revealed similar conclusions that coincide with the claims made by Mazer et al. and Ziegler regarding the perceived value of language learning through Facebook. Yunus and Salehi postulate that students felt their motivation and confidence improved through participating in activities within Facebook. Specifically, the majority of students reported that instant interaction and feedback increased motivation, while informal interactions such as when fellow students *liked* comments helped improve their confidence. Findings from the studies above indicate that Facebook's integration into education has had positive effects on student motivation.

Equally important as motivation, sustaining students' engagement often depends on good instruction, timely delivery of quality materials, and most importantly general student satisfaction. Therefore, a number of studies collectively assert that the inclusion of Facebook along with other Web 2.0 technologies enhance student satisfaction and investment, especially among L2 learners (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Harwood & Blackstone, 2012; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Li & Pitts, 2009; Mills, 2009; Shih, 2011; Wang & Vasquez, 2012; Yunus & Salehi, 2012). Yunus and Salehi's 2012 study parallels most closely to the present research, but dealt only with writing outcomes. They investigated students' perceptions of using Facebook groups for improving students' writing skills, as they engaged in various writing tasks like brainstorming and summarizing. The authors reported positive student attitudes toward Facebook's group application to help improve their writing outcomes. More specifically in their study, Yunus and Salehi highlighted student frustration at the perceived lack of authentic learning available to them in a traditional L2 classroom setting. They found that Facebook's group application can provide such authenticity, especially an environment in which students feel confident enough to use and improve their L2 skills.

In a similar study, Shih (2011) supported Yunus and Salehi's findings by claiming that the use of Facebook for peer-to-peer assessment, a process where learners evaluate their peers' work based on teacher-developed benchmarks, resulted in increased student interest and engagement during study, especially with regard to

writing. Furthermore, Kabilan et al. (2010) reported that students believe their language skills increased through using Facebook, and further, their motivation, confidence, and attitude concerning language learning were also enhanced through their experiences. Taken collectively,  these studies indicate that when Facebook is utilized effectively, it can help build student confidence, which in turn enhances student engagement and satisfaction in language learning.

Additionally, several studies have examined how students generally perceive Facebook for language learning or how Facebook's integration into traditional L2 learning environments has affected or changed student attitudes toward it (Akbari, Eghtesad, & Simmons, 2012; Eren, 2012; Hiew, 2012; Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012). Collectively, the researchers reported an increase in positive student attitudes toward using Facebook. Specifically, Akbari et al. and Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi reported that students considered Facebook a relevant and purposeful educational tool for language learning. Similarly, Eren's study examined student attitudes based on six variables including Facebook's use in education and improving language skills. Both studies reported overall positive attitudes in all categories.

However, there are apparent limitations in each of these studies. Specifically, although Hiew (2012) focuses on student perceptions on all aspects of language learning through Facebook, the study only focused on the data from written discourse drawn from student journals while Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi's study only explored Facebook's impact on individual academic skills (i.e., grammar), also through writing activities only. Meanwhile, Eren's (2012) and Akbari, Eghtesad, and Simmons' (2012) studies have limitations in regard to small participant sample sizes, 48 students and 20 students respectively. However, Eren's study is of particular interest. The researcher looked at Turkish university students' perceptions of using Facebook for language learning and to improve language skills, as they were concerned that most English language teaching is classroom-based and there are few opportunities to use English outside of class. Results indicated that students overall had positive attitudes toward Facebook for educational purposes as well as for improving language skills. However, which language skills students perceived to have benefited the most is not made clear in the study and, as acknowledged by the author, the limited number of participants stands as an important  limitation, and therefore, claims made in the study  are not generalizable to the attitudes of most L2 learners.

These studies support the advantages of utilizing Facebook for language learning. Since a number of studies have already reported on Facebook's positive impact on student motivation, satisfaction, and investment, the present study looked to further support this body of research by exploring the perceptions and attitudes of students regarding Facebook and L2 learning. In recent years, L2 teachers have been faced with conflicting information regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of Facebook's educational potential and need support for any decision they may make in the classroom. With a focus on learner needs and interests, this study was designed to discover how L2 learners perceived the usefulness of specific pedagogical activities conducted on Facebook. Based on the notion that teachers using Facebook as a language learning tool need to have more information about what activities work best in the classroom, the research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are L2 learners' opinions toward the general ease of using Facebook in an educational context?

2. What are L2 learners' attitudes toward the usefulness of Facebook for engaging in specific activities for language learning?

## Methods

*Participants*

The researchers recruited undergraduate students from three private universities in the Kansai region of Japan on a voluntary basis. Initial data were collected from 109 students. Data from 12 participants were removed due to inconsistent responses or failing to complete all sections of the questionnaire. As a result, 97 participants remained – 50 male and 47 female students who were about to complete their first year of university study. The majority of the students were 18 years old at the time of this study. At the time of the study, all participants had Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores ranging from 210 to 490, and would be considered beginner to intermediate learners of English. Additionally, participating students came from several different departments including 12 English majors, 18 business majors, 18 economics majors, and 49 sociology majors.

Finally, as a prerequisite for being selected to participate in the study, all potential students were required to have a Facebook account and prior experience using it. In order to give the researchers a general understanding of the participants' ability to use Facebook, participants were asked via the questionnaire (See Appendix A) to identify their experience using Facebook based on how many years they have used it and how often they access it.

The vast majority of the participants could be categorized as novice or beginner Facebook users. Ninety-five percent ($n = 92$) of respondents had been using Facebook for fewer than two years. The remaining students ($n = 5$) had been using Facebook between three to five years. Participants reported using Facebook on a weekly basis. Forty-three percent of the participants ($n = 42$) reported accessing Facebook one to three times a week while 26% ($n = 25$) reported accessing it four to six times a week. The remainder ($n = 30$) reported accessing it seven or more times per week. Regarding daily use, an overwhelming majority (84%) accessed Facebook zero to three times a day compared to a much smaller group (11%) who accessed it four to six times a day. The rest of the participants (5%) reported accessing it seven or more times a day.

*Instruments*

A mixed method approach was used for this study to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of Japanese university students' use of Facebook in an educational setting, including its capacity to be used in a way similar to a traditional learning management system as well as for various specific language-learning activities. The 26-statement quantitative questionnaire included both statement-type and question-type items and was divided into three sections. Sections One and Two each consisted of 10 statements. Section One examined the respondents' opinions of using Facebook for general educational purposes, while Section Two focused on the

participants' opinions of the applicability of Facebook's group function for conducting specific activities for language learning.

In Section One the first two statements asked students to rate Facebook's potential to function both socially and educationally, while statements three and four asked participants to compare Facebook's mobile accessibility and capacity to deliver official school-related information with their own university websites. The remaining questionnaire items referred to Facebook's suitability as a learning management system. All statements in Section Two asked students to evaluate the effectiveness of using Facebook's group function to deliver a range of activities for language learning covering all four skill sets in addition to other related tasks like note-taking and peer-editing. Section Three contained six demographic and personal questions that asked for students' gender, year level, university type (public or private), and general use of Facebook, including how long they have been using it and how often, on average, they accessed it. Response choices for all three sections were scored from 1 *(Strongly Disagree)* to 7 *(Strongly Agree)* on a Likert scale. Data scored as 4 were considered *neutral* by the researchers. Initially, the researchers chose a 7-point scale to encourage more reliable and varying opinions and to limit responses from being too neutral. Then, for ease of presentation, the results form the questionnaire were collapsed into a three-point scale. For example, data scored from the Disagree side of the Likert Scale, from 1 to 3, were merged and labeled as *Disagree* while data scored from the Agree side of the Likert Scale, 5 to 7, were merged and labeled as *Agree*. Data scored as 4 were labeled as *Neutral*.

An initial questionnaire was created after reviewing relevant literature based on Fowler's (2002) principles of reliability: use of English lexicon, clarity of wording, absence of biased words and phrases, item formatting, standardized response expectations, and clarity of instruction. A voluntary group of 10 university English major students then assessed the questionnaire for clarity. This version of the questionnaire was then amended based on their feedback. Two Japanese university professors of English then translated the updated questionnaire from English to Japanese and then reverse translated it to ensure content validity. After further piloting by two independent volunteer groups of 25 Japanese university students, additional modifications were made to both sets of Questionnaire instructions, including word choice and item statements to ensure a comprehensible and reliable questionnaire and to minimize any language-related misinterpretations. The final version of the questionnaire was distributed in Japanese including all directions, statement items, and rating scales. Upon collection of both the pre- and post-test data, a subsequent paper-based, open-ended written-response questionnaire was created and distributed to better ascertain, through qualitative comments, the students' reasons for possible changes in opinions toward Facebook's educational reliability and attitudes concerning the effectiveness of activities conducted within for language learning purposes. Questions topics mirrored those on the quantitative questionnaire; personal information, questions about general issues regarding using Facebook for educational purposes, and questions asking about student opinions about specific Facebook activities they took part in. (See Appendix A.)

*Procedure*

In October 2012, the start of the second semester in the Japanese academic year, the researchers administered the questionnaire to all participants. They were asked to complete the paper-based questionnaire outside of class within a week so that they could take their time answering each question honestly and competently. Students were also informed that all questionnaire responses were anonymous. For Section Two, students were asked to provide responses based on initial reaction on whether each activity could be successful or useful if conducted through Facebook, because some students may have had little or no experience with the activities at this point of the research.

The research was carried out over 10 weeks of classes. Classes met once a week for 90 minutes, but Facebook-related activities were limited to less than 25 minutes per class session, adding to slightly more than four hours of class time. However, the subjects also participated in Facebook activities outside of class and this time could not be precisely measured. Tasks mirrored the questions on Section Two of the quantitative survey. These tasks included posting videos, links, and writing and reacting to posts by other students and teachers, interacting with foreign *guest speakers,* editing others' written work posted online, and interacting with the instructor through the Facebook messaging system.

In mid-December 2012, the identical paper-based questionnaire was administered in the same manner as the initial questionnaire. The statements were slightly modified to the past tense because the research was in its concluding phrase. Upon compiling data from both the pre- and post-questionnaires, participating students were given a paper-based, open-ended, written-response questionnaire. Given the timing of the school term and the extensive nature of the question items contained within this questionnaire, students were asked to complete their answers over the two-week winter break. Additionally, to encourage thoughtful responses, students were given the option to submit their answers in Japanese, English, or a combination of both.

*Data Analysis*

Descriptive analyses of the quantitative data were conducted using *SPSS* version 21.0 (SPSS, 2012). In order to analyze the qualitative data, the researchers used a content analysis approach. The main analytical step in content analysis was the coding of narratives based on emerging themes, trends, patterns, or conceptual categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data were initially sorted and coded into 15 themes. Once initial themes were identified, the researchers then reevaluated and refined the entire body of data by regrouping related themes and finally combined categories to compile a new list of five general themes. As with most content analyses, a small portion of the content remained uncategorized due to either vagueness or lack of relevance. As such, a number of the original contributions fell into the category of *other*, which included undecided and face-to-face communication is good. Differences in opinion between the two researchers were resolved through discussion.

**Results**

First, a reliability analysis was used to investigate the internal consistency reliability among the 20 statement items within the questionnaire. The reliability estimate for Section 1 (10 items) had a Cronbach Alpha value of .82 while Section 2 (10 items) had a Cronbach Alpha of .89, both signifying a high degree of consistency among the 20 items.

Next, an exploratory factor analysis procedure was used on the pre-test to reduce the data and identify any groupings being measured among the statement items. For statement items 1-10, the factor analysis identified a three-factor solution. The first factor, *Ease of Use*, comprised statement items 1-3 while the second factor, *Educational Use,* contained items 4-6. The final factor, *Instructional Use,* contained items 8-10. For both the pre- and post-test descriptive statistics, the combined averages of the statement items within each category are presented as frequency distributions. As Table 1 shows, based on descriptive statistics there were no major changes identified in participant opinions following the completion of the study.

**Table 1**

*Means and standard deviations of each factor in Section 1.*

|                   | Pre-test | | Posttest | |
| ----------------- | ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
|                   | M    | SD   | M    | SD   |
| Ease of use       | 4.74 | .86  | 4.77 | 1.13 |
| Educational use   | 4.47 | 1.00 | 4.60 | 1.00 |
| Instructional use | 4.87 | 1.05 | 4.60 | 1.27 |

With regard to the first research question, learners' attitudes toward using Facebook in education, Table 2 shows the frequency data of the participants' opinions for each of the three factors for both pre- and posttest.

**Table 2**

*Frequency of Responses for each of the Three Factors for Section 1.*

|   |   | Pre-test | | | Posttest | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   |   | Disagree (%) | Neutral (%) | Agree (%) | Disagree (%) | Neutral (%) | Agree (%) |
|   | *Ease of Use* | | | | | | |
| S1 | Facebook can be used both socially and for educational purposes. | 7 | 22 | 71 | 13 | 24 | 63 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S2 | Facebook is safe to use both socially and for educational purposes. | 21 | 26 | 54 | 20 | 27 | 54 |
| S3 | Facebook is easier to access from my mobile phone than my own university's website. | 7 | 16 | 76 | 18 | 25 | 58 |
| S4 | Facebook is easier to find school-related information than my own university website. | 7 | 31 | 62 | 19 | 24 | 58 |

*Educational Use*

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S5 | It's easy to make posts, upload pictures and videos on Facebook. | 9 | 16 | 74 | 14 | 18 | 68 |
| S6 | Facebook is a good place to keep in contact with other students from class. | 15 | 28 | 57 | 21 | 31 | 48 |
| S7 | Facebook is a good place to contact my teacher outside of class. | 18 | 37 | 45 | 16 | 25 | 59 |

*Instructional Use*

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S8 | Facebook is a good place to check class notes or homework assignments posted by the teacher. | 13 | 40 | 46 | 10 | 21 | 69 |
| S9 | Facebook is a good place to ask for help about homework assignments. | 19 | 42 | 39 | 20 | 27 | 54 |
| S10 | Facebook is a good place to check for school-related updates and notices. | 10 | 40 | 49 | 18 | 35 | 47 |

For Ease of Use, the results showed that participants overall responded favorably to all statement items on both the pre- and posttest. Although, it should be pointed out that although general opinions regarding Facebook's ease of use were all positive in the posttest, participant perceptions either remained the same or decreased slightly from the pre-test. However, most importantly, the majority of participants (63%) felt that Facebook could be used both socially and educationally. Similarly, 58% of the participants' felt that Facebook was easier to use than their own university websites in order to access school-related information. Identical participant responses also favored Facebook, compared to university websites, when accessing content via mobile phones. Positive participant beliefs shown here toward Facebook's usability  suggest that there were few difficulties or limitations experienced by the participants that might limit their learning potential.

Regarding Facebook's Educational Use, results showed that participants had mixed opinions. Overall, majority responses were positive at both pre- and posttest, but attitudes decreased slightly at posttest for two of the three corresponding items concerning the educational use of Facebook. In particular, participants had contrasting perceptions toward Facebook's learning potential between student-teacher and student-student interactions. On the other hand, the highest rate of participant responses, using Facebook for posting content (68%), indicated that Facebook's unique platform and functionality is ideal for educational pursuits, which seems to correspond with participant attitudes toward Facebook's general ease of use.

Concerning the Instructional Use of Facebook, results indicated that at pre-test participants' responses were only moderately positive, leaning more toward neutral, but in fact, showed some of the largest changes in perceptions at posttest. Moreover, the largest increases in observations reported at posttest related to the participants' ability to access information or communicate through Facebook for specific learning purposes, for example, in order to complete homework assignments.

As shown in Table 3, which refers to the second research question about L2 learners' attitudes toward the usefulness of Facebook for engaging in specific activities for language learning, statement items 11-20 were also categorized into three distinct factors. The Interpersonal Communication factor statements included items 11, 16, 18, and 20 while the Interpretive Communication factor statements consisted of items 13-15 and 19. The final factor, Presentational Communication statements were comprised of the remaining items 12 and 17. The descriptive statistical analysis for each group's pre- and post-test data again did not reveal any major changes in student attitudes based on the average scores presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Means and standard deviations for each statement type of each factor in Section 2.*

|  | Pre-test | | Posttest | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Interpersonal | 4.58 | .80 | 4.58 | 1.14 |
| Interpretative | 4.46 | .88 | 4.54 | 1.20 |
| Presentational | 4.35 | 1.04 | 4.32 | 1.27 |

Turing to student attitudes toward activities and tasks afforded through Facebook, Table 4 shows overall that initial participant beliefs were generally positive for 8 of the 10 statement items in the pre-test. In comparison, the majority of participants responded positively to all statement items in the posttest.

**Table 4**

*Frequency of Responses for each item of the Three Factors for Section 2.*

| | | Pre-test | | | Posttest | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Interpersonal Communication* | Disagree (%) | Neutral (%) | Agree (%) | Disagree (%) | Neutral (%) | Agree (%) |
| S11 | Facebook is a good place to discuss different topics with classmates. | 9 | 29 | 62 | 21 | 26 | 54 |
| S16 | Facebook is a good place to post writing assignments like short stories or essays. | 4 | 39 | 57 | 22 | 23 | 56 |
| S18 | Facebook is a good place access links to resources provided by the teacher. | 30 | 37 | 33 | 24 | 32 | 44 |
| S20 | Facebook is a good place to post and respond to surveys. | 15 | 47 | 51 | 14 | 21 | 65 |
| | *Interpretative Communication* | | | | | | |
| S13 | Facebook is a good place to read articles and take notes to prepare for next class. | 12 | 29 | 59 | 29 | 21 | 51 |
| S14 | Facebook is a good place to listen to audio files and take notes to prepare for next class. | 22 | 33 | 45 | 25 | 26 | 49 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S15 | Facebook is a good place to peer review or peer edit class-mates' writing assignments. | 15 | 31 | 54 | 15 | 26 | 59 |
| S19 | Facebook is a good place to watch YouTube videos and discuss comprehension questions with classmates. | 16 | 36 | 34 | 18 | 24 | 59 |
| | *Presentational Communication* | | | | | |
| S12 | Facebook is a good place to make video posts as assignments. | 20 | 31 | 49 | 29 | 25 | 46 |
| S17 | Facebook is a good place to have discus-sions with "guest speakers" like international students. | 25 | 30 | 46 | 24 | 26 | 51 |

For the Interpersonal Communication statements, results show that partici-pant attitudes were mostly positive toward specific activities or tasks at pre-test and positive throughout in the posttest. Although general attitudes decreased slightly for two of four corresponding items, favorable attitudes toward related activities were revealed nonetheless indicating that participants identified the value of most tasks and activities through Facebook, which supported Interpersonal Communication as a component of their language learning.

For the Interpretive Communication statements, results indicated that, like the responses related to Interpersonal Communication, participant attitudes were mixed at pre-test with either neutral or positive responses being reported, but at posttest all responses were positive. Regarding activities and tasks, participants reported some of the highest positive responses (59%) at posttest, especially where they were able to interact and communicate with each other as part of their learning experience. Spe-cifically, participants enjoyed peer editing writing or discussing videos; all outside of the classroom and through Facebook's user platform.

For the Presentational Communication statements, as seen with the other fac-tors, participant attitudes slightly declined at posttest, but overall participant attitudes were favorable both at pre- and posttest. Reported responses seem to demonstrate that participants largely viewed the activities or tasks beneficial for their learning and perceived Facebook as providing a realistic and advantageous platform for learning.

In order to present a better understanding of the attitudes and perceptions participants hold toward Facebook and language learning, qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted primarily to triangulate with quantitative data. The qualitative data from this study have been combined and themed through an inductive approach. The resultant themed categories, frequency of responses, and selected relevant comments are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Categories, frequency of responses, and typical participant responses.*

| Inductive Categories | Frequency of Responses | Typical Participant Responses |
|---|---|---|
| Usefulness | 33% | One of the advantages of speaking by video is that I can practice many times. |
| | | I have to think daily life in English, so I could know many words that use in daily life. |
| | | I think advantage of using Facebook is we can check this wherever we were. |
| | | I can communicate with classmates out of the class through Facebook. |
| | | I can access it easily and I am easy to realize received email. |
| Social Interaction | 23% | I liked this activity because I was able to know about the members of this class well. |
| | | I had a lot of interest in Facebook, I want to connect more with my teacher and other students. I don't have so much of a chance to meet people from English speaking countries so it was a good chance. |
| Difficulties | 22% | I could not sleep well when mails are sent in midnight. |
| | | It was difficult to upload video. |
| | | If students don't have smart phone or PC, they can't do this activity immediately. |
| Enjoyment | 16% | I was happy to receive comments from my friends. |
| | | I had a lot of interest in Facebook, I want to connect more with my teacher and other students. |
| | | I enjoyed this activity. Because, I could know about my classmate's well. |

| Other | 4% | Facebook email and regular e-mail has similarity. So I think whichever is okay. |
| | | Good to hear native English. |
| | | Both speaking in front of the class and speaking by video are good to improve English skills. |

Responses to qualitative open-ended items disclosed that, in contrast to the quantitative data, the majority of participants largely favored Facebook as a possible educational tool for language learning. Positive responses outnumbered negative responses by three to one, contradicting the results from the quantitative data. Negative responses made were initially coded in several ways such as privacy concerns and safety concerns as well as practical hardware and software difficulties. The codes representing various problems, concerns, and negative reactions were combined to one category labeled difficulties. Typical responses made by participants concerning shared difficulties with using Facebook were *I had troubles many times when I upload videos and It is because that I can't trust Facebook's mail in security.*

The category with the most positive responses was categorized as *usefulness.* The largest benefit reported by participants for this category is captured by these participant comments: *In Facebook, we can think more deeply so we can make correct sentences in English* and *Using Facebook is easy way to check responses and to join other conversation.*

The category with the next largest number of positive responses, *Social interactions*, featured comments such as this representative one: *I like this activity because in daily life I can't ask question for exchange students in English.* The fourth major category of *Enjoyment* encompassed the various positive comments that expressed interest, enjoyment, and happiness in a direct way. These comments typically stated that using Facebook for a particular activity was *fun*, that they *enjoyed it,* or that it was *good*. The final category of *Other*, which had the fewest frequency of responses reported, contains individual comments that did not necessarily align with any of the final categories chosen. Typical responses expressed for this category either did not directly address the question being asked or they could not be classified as either being a positive or negative response.

In summary, based on the quantitative data at posttest, while there were both positive and negative changes in participant perceptions toward Facebook's potential in L2 education and language activities through Facebook, most changes were minimal. The largest changes in perceptions were in favor of Facebook's usefulness. Specifically, the majority of highest total number of positive responses in agreement were noted for the Ease of Use factor, while responses for Instructional Use revealed the greatest positive changes in participant attitudes overall. Additionally, the qualitative data tended to show more positive attitudes overall toward Facebook, even contradicting quantitative results in some instances.

**Discussion**

*L2 Learners' Opinions toward the General Ease of Using Facebook in an Educational Context*

    With regard to the first research question, the present study indicates that participant beliefs towards the general ease of use of Facebook in education were overall positive and very positive in the case of the qualitative data. However, in some cases in the quantitative data, participant perceptions of Facebook actually diminished over the duration of the study.

    *Ease of use.* The underlining rationale for using Facebook in education is that the SNS optimally affords students opportunities to collaborate and co-construct knowledge according to social constructivist principles. The asynchronous nature of social media learning environments are not bound to a specific location as with traditional classrooms, and support the principles of sociocultural theory. Of course, such reasoning relies on available technology and instructional procedures to be deemed easy to use. The qualitative data showed that participants were positive about using Facebook in general and the *Usefulness* category, with the highest percentage of responses, comprised many responses that expressed how easy Facebook was to use. However the quantitative data were not as positive as the qualitative data.

    The decrease in participants' ratings with respect to the ease of access by mobile phone and finding school-related information through Facebook compared to a school-sponsored website were unexpected. Researchers conducting this investigation hypothesized that students would find Facebook easier for accessing information than school-sponsored websites, assuming students would receive instant updates on their mobile phones from Facebook's notification function whenever new information was added. This assumption was supported by the participants' own reflections as noted in qualitative data results, even though quantitative results appeared to contradictory. Many participant comments were similar to the following: *Facebook is a good way to convey information about class. All the members of my English class have a cellular phone and are connected to the Internet.*

    However, although the researchers regularly made updates on homework and other class information to the wall within the class Facebook group, these posts may have been buried in the other traffic from participant posts, exposing a limitation of using Facebook as a course management system, as supported in the literature (Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, & Mei, 2012). Another possibility is that the Facebook group focused more on class information than on university-wide information and students still had to access campus information elsewhere.

    *Educational use.* Student responses to Statement 6 (contacting other students) and Statement 7 (contacting the teacher) were also contrary to the researchers' expectations. Participant perceptions of Facebook's usefulness in contacting classmates decreased in the posttest while simultaneously the agreement in perceptions increased toward contacting their instructor, essentially reversing their feelings about the two features. Such findings are especially important because the main social constructivist rationale of using Facebook for language learning is to provide a context where students can interact with each other for learning purposes.

    In regard to lower posttest opinions of Facebook being a good place to contact classmates, one notable explanation readily comes to mind. Initially, to ease security

and privacy concerns, participants were encouraged by the researchers to create a separate Facebook profile for their educational use and many of them indicated that they had done so. Therefore, it could be assumed that students with new educational identities likely accessed them much less frequently than their regular accounts and consequently did not include many pictures, videos, or regular updates as they usually would. By not considering the social connectedness that students usually associate with Facebook, they may have lost interest in communicating further with each other beyond the activities themselves. In line with the social constructivist concept of the *community of learning*, it is suggested here that students must not merely be online, but must also create a learning community to reap the benefits of using social media in education.

Regarding participants' perceptions of Facebook being a good place to contact the teacher, the researchers regularly posted updates on Facebook and were available on Facebook to answer questions or give advice. Additionally, the instructors shared personal items like pictures of vacations and family members or in some cases participated in student activities. This willingness to connect with the participants is evidenced in student comments such as , *When I sent E-mail to my teacher, we were able to exchange our opinion each other. I was able to receive quick replies from my teacher so I thought that it was good way.* The noticeable difference in participant perceptions in pre- vs. post-test statements (S6 and S7) emphasize claims made by Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007) that teacher self-disclosure, the amount of personal information made public, positively influences student participation and active learning. According to Mazer et al., Facebook provides both teachers and students with the opportunity to make interpersonal connections with each other. Therefore, teachers considering the use of Facebook should encourage students to use their regular Facebook profiles in order to build interest in fostering relationships beyond the classroom. In the absence of incorporating this key relational  characteristic that Facebook affords, student motivation may be negatively impacted and learning outcomes consequently limited. Students may be apprehensive at first, but teachers can guide them through the privacy settings and demonstrate to them  the role of Facebook's group platform. With the group platform, students can participate in all activities as group members without the obligation to be friends with  their classmates, should they choose not to.

*Instructional use.* The largest increase in perceptions from the pre-test to post-test within this category was seen in Statement 8, using Facebook to check homework assignments. Japanese university students often have long commutes and other responsibilities in and out of the classroom and therefore appreciate being able to access class information at their convenience. A majority of participants reflected on these aspects of Facebook's usefulness and many responses can be summarized by one participant's observation:

> It was convenient for me to check what I had to do in weekend and I was able to check what we did in that class. This activity helped me to plan what I did and I was able to prepare next classes. In that respect Facebook is good for me.

Such participant responses are consistent with previous research (Akbari et al., 2012; Bosch, 2009; Karimi & Khodabandelou, 2013; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Maloney, 2007; Ophus & Abbitt, 2009) where participants' perceptions

were mainly positive in regard to using Facebook to access materials related to their studies and improving learning outcomes. In this respect, the researchers postulate that the asynchronous nature of Facebook in which essential class components are not tied to time and place is one of its prime strengths and demonstrates Facebook's potential as a power educational tool, and one which educators should especially take advantage of for this instructional benefit.

*L2 Learners' Attitudes toward the Usefulness of Facebook for Engaging in Specific Activities for Language Learning*

Regarding the second research question, the results suggested that participants' attitudes toward most statement items relating to specific activities through Facebook were largely positive both prior to and after completing the study. Again the qualitative data showed a strong favorable perception of using Facebook for specific activities, which was mostly reflected in the two categories *Usefulness* and *Making Connections*. However, there are several activities or tasks that show clear changes in attitudes, both optimistically and pessimistically in the quantitative data that are relevant and merit discussion in more detail.

*Interpersonal statements.* Attitudes toward Statement 11, discussing topics with classmates, decreased upon posttest, which is in contrast to a number of other studies (Arendt, Matic, & Zhu, 2012; Omar, Embi, & Yunus, 2012; Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012) where students enjoyed conversing on Facebook rather than in a traditional classroom setting. It could be inferred that higher positive attitudes in the pretest were based on experiences communicating socially with friends on Facebook and that discussing topics in an academic setting did not meet the participants' prior expectations. However, many topics discussed were similar to the ones the participants might typically discuss socially, for example, favorite places to eat, hobbies, or recent movies they have seen. Perhaps the participants felt that longer discussions were troublesome because postings in Facebook are structured chronologically, which makes tracking and participating in long discussions cumbersome. This assumption is supported by qualitative comments made by the participants themselves highlighted here: *I could enjoy this practice. Because I could communicate with many classmates and I could know their hobbies, circle, memories and so on, but when classmates make posts to me, I felt tired to comment to all.*

This follows similar results by DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler, and Francis (2009) and Wang et al. (2012), who reported that participants felt discussions were *unnatural* and they did not like having them. Therefore, it is recommended that clear instructions be made apparent to students prior to beginning any activity. This postulation is supported by Kaliban et al., (2010) who stated that in order for students to see the learning value of participating in discussion activities through Facebook, teachers need to clearly inform them of the objectives and intended learning outcomes of each activity and deemphasize instructions on how to use Facebook to complete the tasks.

*Interpretive Communication statements.* Regarding Statement 14, listening to audio files and taking notes, attitudes only slightly increased in the posttest, which the researchers found surprising since the largest change in participant attitudes was seen in Statement 19, watching YouTube videos through Facebook and answer-

ing questions. Both of these activities are similar in that they are equally accessible through Facebook and both include a listening and writing component. Qualitative responses suggest that participants perceive these two activities differently because they appear to prefer the visual component of videos when learning: *Accessing files through Facebook is very easy and I can do both, and I like to see the video many times, but I tired to listen only.*

As supported by participant comments, the researchers suggest that the difference in attitudes reported between Statements 14 and 19 is not based on student perception of any limitation of Facebook's usefulness. Therefore, based on the noticeable change in positive attitudes, as particularly noted with Statement 19, the researchers believe it would be advantageous for educators considering the use of Facebook to conduct various listening activities by utilizing videos, such as YouTube, more often than audio files.

*Presentational Communication statements.* Regarding the final two statement items, results indicate only slight changes in participant attitudes. However, the attitudes expressed by the participants toward Statement 12, making video assignments, are of particular interest. The results indicate that attitudes at the pre-test were only moderately positive and in fact decreased at the posttest as participants indicated they were less convinced of the activity's usefulness. However, qualitative comments suggest otherwise as participant attitudes were extremely positive toward this activity for improving their language accuracy. A number of participants expressed positive attitudes toward Facebook's usefulness as a platform for posting video assignments and a number of popular responses reported are highlighted in the following comment: *Before I post video, I practice many times. And after post video, I could check my video. Thanks to it, I could notice whether my pronunciation was poor.*

Participant attitudes seem to show that they were more concerned about the quality of their work and took a more active role in their learning when participating in this type of activity through Facebook. Here one notes students' extra engagement with their *learning community*. Although the main task is actually an individual activity, students take a keen interest in their performance due to the participation of a peer group in a secondary aspect of the overall activity. By identifying their own mistakes and weaknesses, and repeatedly practicing until they were satisfied with what they produced, not only did participants demonstrate an increased investment in their learning (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Harwood & Blackstone, 2012; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Li & Pitts, 2009; Mills, 2009; Shih 2011; Wang & Vasquez, 2012; Yunus & Salehi, 2012), they also took responsibility for their own learning, which is considered an important element of learner autonomy (Littlewood, 1999). Additionally, the collaborative learning process in which the participants engaged coincides well with social constructivist theories on education that focus on learning as an active and social activity.

## Conclusions

In line with social constructivist theory, the primary benefits of Facebook as a powerful learning tool include affordance of opportunities for students to collaborate and share knowledge (Bosch, 2009; Maloney, 2007; McCarthy, 2012) and its capacity to promote, "greater interactive learning opportunities through genuine

communication and social interaction in the target language" (Wang & Vasquez, 2012, p. 416). The opinions voiced and attitudes expressed by the participants of this study regarding the use of Facebook in L2 education were generally positive overall, but the findings need to be replicated in other environments in order to confirm more definitive results. Nevertheless, for educators considering the use of Facebook in a L2 classroom setting,  several notable suggestions emanate from this study.

First, it is recommended to keep an open mind about Facebook's educational value as students overall demonstrated positive attitudes toward its usefulness. Specifically in this research, students specified essential class materials not being tied to time and place as one of the prime strengths of Facebook's educational potential. Second, this study showed that when activities are conducted within a learning community  composed of peers, learners took an active role and exhibited more self-determination to improve their weakness until they were personally satisfied. Third, based on this study, the researchers believe that Facebook's platform, although not without its limitations, is capable of providing students with a multitude of activities that can be adapted and tailored for students' learning needs whether they be listening, speaking, reading, or writing tasks. Our conclusion is supported by several other researchers who collectively infer that when activities through Facebook are engaging and students can collaborate and reflect on their own learning, then motivation, confidence, and attitudes will improve (Kaliban et al. 2010; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Shih, 2011; Yunus & Salehi, 2012). Finally, Hardwood and Blackstone (2012) summarize  findings from this study as well as other similar studies. Accordingly, they reaffirm Facebook's potential role in promoting L2 teaching and learning, by claiming that because of its popularity and prevalence in students' lives, educators need to consider Facebook as a learning tool  that creates a greater community of learners, offers students another avenue for individual knowledge development, and links formal and informal learning.

The researchers acknowledge the limitations of this preliminary study and have identified several points of interest for improvement in future studies. First, both the quantitative and qualitative questionnaires utilized in this study were original in concept and were not adopted from another study. Although great effort was undertaken by both researchers to develop a comprehensible and reliable questionnaire, the researchers combined several statements with similar ideas into one whereas each item should have been presented separately on its own in order to gather more accurate participant responses.

Additionally, this study was conducted in the second semester of the participants' first year in university and therefore, due to time constraints, was only conducted over a two-and-a-half month period. Ideally, future studies should be more longitudinal, perhaps over the course of a year as more. Varied changes in participant attitudes would be more likely observed and valid responses achieved, if participants have a longer time to form objective opinions on the probability of activities through Facebook to improve language learning. Finally, this study was conducted on just fewer than 100 Japanese students, and therefore it is hoped other researchers will independently replicate this study in the near future in similar East Asian L2 contexts, perhaps on a much larger scale, and that further analyses, especially on qualitative data, be thoroughly investigated in order to better validate the findings reported here.

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**Appendix A**

**Facebook Questionnaire**

**Section 1.** My Perceptions of using Facebook
*Please choose the answer that best reflects your view for each item. Answer each item as truthfully as possible using the following rating scale.*

| Strongly Disagree | | | Neutral | | | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

1. Facebook can be used both socially and for educational purposes.

2. Facebook is safe to use both socially and for educational purposes.

3. Facebook is easier to access from my mobile phone than my own university's website.

4. Facebook is easier to find school-related information than my own university website.

5. It's easy to make posts, upload pictures and videos on Facebook.

6. Facebook is a good place to keep in contact with other students from class.

7. Facebook is a good place to contact my teacher outside of class.

8. Facebook is a good place to check class notes or homework assignments posted by the teacher.

9. Facebook is a good place to ask for help about homework assignments.

10. Facebook is a good place to check for school related updates and notices.

**Section 2.** My Perceptions of Activities on Facebook

*This next set of questions asks for your opinion on activities that could be done through Facebook. Please choose the answer that best reflects your view for each item. Answer each item as truthfully as possible using the rating scale from above.*

11. Facebook is a good place to discuss different topics with classmates.

12. Facebook is a good place to make video posts as assignments.

13. Facebook is a good place to read articles and take notes to prepare for next class.

14. Facebook is a good place to listen to audio files and take notes to prepare for next class.

15. Facebook is a good place to access links to resources provided by the teacher.

16. Facebook is a good place to have discussions with "guest speakers" like international students.

17. Facebook is a good place to post writing assignments like short stories or essays.

18. Facebook is a good place to peer review or peer edit classmates' writing assignments

19. Facebook is a good place to watch Youtube videos and discuss comprehension questions with classmates.

20. Facebook is a good place to post and respond to surveys.

**Section 3.** Personal Information

21. Gender:  1. Female    2. Male

22. Year level:  ☐ 1. 1st      ☐ 2. 2nd      ☐ 3. 3rd      ☐ 4. 4th

23. University Type:  ☐ 1. Private      ☐ 2. Public

24. I have been using Facebook for:  1. 0-2 years      2. 3-5 years      3. 6-8 years

25. How often, on average, do you access Facebook per week?

   A. 1-3 x a week      B. 4-6 x a week      C. 7 or more x a week

26. How often, on average, do you access Facebook per day?

   A. 1-3 x a day        B. 4-6 x a day          C. 7 or more x a day

# 4

# Influencing Students' Pronunciation and Willingness to Communicate through Interpersonal Audio Discussions

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## Abstract

*This article discusses a study that investigated pronunciation development in second language learners by monitoring willingness to communicate variables. Students (N = 37) in a second-semester, introductory French course participated in online interpersonal audio discussions with classmates through VoiceThread. Pronunciation development and willingness to communicate were monitored through self-assessment after completing each activity. Analysis revealed that participation in the activities combined with a feedback-supported environment resulted in an overall increase in perceived pronunciation abilities that positively correlated with willingness to communicate variables. Additionally, the pedagogical benefits of using audio discussions to improve pronunciation are presented.*

## Background

Recent researchers Liao and Zhao (2012) agree with the notion that communicative language teaching (CLT) is the most commonly implemented second language (L2) teaching approach worldwide. Although this popular approach supports the development of an overall communicative competence, a multi-dimensional construct that includes linguistic accuracy (Munro & Derwing, 2011; Omaggio Hadley, 2001), the role of accurate pronunciation within CLT is often uncertain (Pennington & Richards, 1986; Tshirner, 1996). In fact, the majority of L2 classrooms operating under the CLT approach do not specifically address pronunciation learning (Arteaga, 2000; Harlow & Muyskens, 1994; Morin, 2007; Munro & Derwing, 2011; Spada, 2007).

Ahmad and Rao (2012) pointed out that current research trends are signaling a combination of form-focused and meaning-based instruction in order to better meet dynamic student needs (Larsen-Freeman 2007; Savignon, 2007; Spada 2007). Research has also indicated that L2 students desire accent reduction, a result achieved through an intervention that lessens the presence of a foreign accent, thus continuing to request instruction in pronunciation (Drewelow & Theobald, 2007; Gynan, 1989; Harlow & Muyskens, 1994; Munro & Derwing, 1995). Researchers have begun to study pronunciation development within the context of emerging technologies because the Internet has provided easy access to audio and recording technologies in recent years (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009; Lord, 2008). Researchers have also inves-

tigated factors related to willingness to communicate (WTC) such as anxiety and self-confidence in regard to students' achievement in pronunciation (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998; Saint Léger & Storch, 2009; Smit, 2002). The present study was developed in order to investigate collectively pronunciation and WTC in the communicative classroom while also further exploring emerging audio technologies. Furthermore, the study addresses pronunciation in learners enrolled in introductory L2 courses, a population that has not been studied extensively in prior pronunciation-related research.

## Literature Review

**The WTC model.** MacIntyre et al. (1998) expanded on McCroskey and Baer's (1985) definition of WTC as a personality trait and adapted WTC to the L2 context by creating the WTC model. This model takes into account the many variables present when initiating a communicative exchange in the L2. MacIntyre et al. found that the language of communication can dramatically affect a person's WTC because it introduces a level of uncertainty that contains more complex variables than those that influence WTC in the native language. Furthermore, they did not overtly address pronunciation in their WTC model; however, the result of WTC is the learner's readiness to enter into discourse with others using the L2, an act that involves some effort in producing accurate sounds and comprehensible utterances for interlocutors. Accessing pronunciation is, therefore, a resulting behavior of WTC and the decision to engage in communication with another speaker.

Additionally linking pronunciation and factors affecting WTC is Smit's (2002) work concerning motivation in pronunciation. Smit noted two key points: pronunciation is undeniably an integral part of language learning and motivation plays a role in language learning. MacIntyre et al. (1998) also believed that WTC is made up of inter-related layers, both psychological and linguistic, such as L2-related anxiety, motivation, and communicative competence. In a previous study, Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) used WTC as a successful predictor variable to address L2 learners' communicative performance by identifying correlations between WTC, motivational variables, and the number of words and turns in speaking samples. L2 communication, WTC variables, and pronunciation are thus linked and serve in the present study as the departure point for investigating the effects of interpersonal audio discussions on pronunciation development in L2 students at the introductory level.

**WTC variables.** The WTC model (MacIntyre et al., 1998) focuses on two main types of variables that influence overall WTC: situational and enduring. MacIntyre et al. identified personality characteristics as enduring because this variable cannot likely be altered and may serve as the source from which the remaining variables function. A variable that can be both situational and enduring is L2 self-confidence. MacIntyre et al. contended that there are two components to the self-confidence variable, one being the learner's cognitive evaluation of his or her L2 abilities, the other being the level of anxiety that the learner experiences when using the L2. They acknowledged that in order to achieve WTC and then actually use the L2 for communication, learners must have a sufficient self-confidence. As noted by MacIntyre et al., increased anxiety reduces self-confidence, thus negatively influencing WTC (Spielberger, 1983). Self-confidence is found alongside interpersonal motivation

and intergroup motivation. This particular placement of self-confidence within the model thus links learners' anxiety with the construct of motivation in L2 learning. Sufficient motivation and positive self-confidence result in what is termed by MacIntyre et al. as state communicative self-confidence, a variable of WTC that permits students to feel capable of communication at a particular moment when the opportunity to use the L2 is presented, leading to L2 use. Smit's (2002) motivation in pronunciation construct pinpointed several factors specific to pronunciation that overlap with the WTC model. Smit identified statistically significant factors affecting motivation in pronunciation learning such as how students rated their chance of success (self-efficacy) and how comfortable students felt about their pronunciation (anxiety and self-confidence). According to MacIntyre et al., self-confidence determines the students' level of desire to actually interact in the L2 and is highly correlated with overall WTC. Achieving state communicative self-confidence is representative of students' feelings of confidence regarding L2 communication based on how they perceive their own linguistic, discourse, pragmatic, and strategic competencies. The application of the WTC construct in the present study demonstrates the importance of exploring both the psychological and linguistic factors that ultimately lead to opportunities to apply pronunciation skills through L2 use.

**Feedback and WTC.** Saint Léger and Storch's (2009) study concerning WTC and perceived oral abilities in the L2 found that students reporting a positive self-confidence and high level of perceived oral proficiency did not feel anxious during oral activities. Similarly, MacIntyre and Doucette's (2010) research found that WTC variables were positively correlated with perceived communication competence and were negatively correlated with L2 speaking anxiety. Saint Léger and Storch used self-assessment (SA) as a form of feedback in their study that addressed WTC and learners' perceptions during oral speaking tasks with the goal of urging learners to become more reflective and independent. They reported that SA enabled the learners to monitor their participation more closely. As learners' anxiety decreased, the ability to self-assess more accurately increased, creating another form of feedback in the L2 context. Murakami, Valvona, and Broudy (2012) discovered that regular assessments conducted by both students and peers, as well as instructor-provided evaluations, brought about significant increases in frequency of spoken language in the class and increased engagement with language learning beyond the classroom. Just as Saint Léger and Storch believed that SA had an overall positive impact on students, Murakami et al. found that the least effective approach when addressing oral communication with students occurred in scenarios that relied solely on assessment from the instructor. Therefore, previous research suggests that building self-confidence through L2 related anxiety reduction is essential in improving WTC in L2 learners.

**Addressing pronunciation through technology.** A more contextualized approach has been taken to develop pronunciation tasks in recent years. This approach has consisted of the introduction of audio files such as podcasts that can be created and shared by anyone who has a computer, microphone, and internet connection. Aguilar (2007) observed that podcasts are teaching materials that have been custom-made by the instructors for the needs of their own students and provide additional material to their learners. Abdous, Camarena, and Facer (2009) remarked on the

academic value of audio technologies as useful learning tools because they have been shown to improve oral and aural skills, and they lead to gains in vocabulary and knowledge of grammatical rules.

Thorne and Payne (2005) described the *iPod* first-year experience at Duke University where elementary Spanish students used the university's *iTunes* site to download listening materials such as audio flashcards, dramatic readings from instructors, and songs for improving pronunciation. According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language's Proficiency Guidelines (2006) regarding speaking, podcasting activities can assist novice speakers in communicating on predictable topics using words and phrases that have been recalled or memorized. Since the introduction of *iPods* in language courses at Duke University, researchers have sought to explore in-depth the relationship between digital audio tools and pronunciation. Sze (2006) maintained through her examination of podcasts for English language training that students who participated in podcasting typically practiced and rehearsed before submitting a final recording; through this repetition and practice, student pronunciation improved. Phonetics students in Lord's (2008) collaborative podcast project made recordings, and then shared them through a podcasting service with their assigned group who then left written comments regarding pronunciation for each group member. Judges also rated the recordings based on overall pronunciation ability using a 5-point scale (native-like versus non-native-like). The podcasting project resulted in an increase in positive attitudes among students regarding the use of podcasting, and students reported being able to transfer the practice gained through podcasting to their daily use of the L2. Lord also reported a statistically significant improvement in the mean class rating assigned by judges regarding the students' pronunciation ratings upon the project's conclusion.

Early and Swanson's (2008) research addressed multimedia tools and oral assessment, and they found that students tended to report less anxiety and more self-confidence when oral skills are assessed through technology. Similarly, Ducate and Lomicka (2009) implemented a podcasting project to refine pronunciation skills at the intermediate level. They found that students preferred this activity because they received feedback provided by native and non-native speaker judges using a 5-point comprehensibility and accentedness scale and through a rubric used by their instructor. Students also appreciated the additional opportunity for creativity; however, there were no consistent significant reports of improvements in accentedness or comprehensibility regarding the students' pronunciation over the course of the study.

In their review of applications of academic podcasting in L2 settings, Lomicka and Lord (2010) found that pronunciation practice is one of the top three reasons why L2 educators use podcasting and predicted that pronunciation podcasting will be introduced as enhancements to language learning modules. Aguilar (2007) pointed out that one pitfall of podcasting for learning purposes is that content has, for the most part, only been delivered in an audio format. For example, visual (as opposed to aural) learners may not respond to course materials. Although there are many positive benefits of podcasting concerning pronunciation development, a continued dialogue in how to address technology and pronunciation in the CLT classroom is needed because Zhao (2003) pointed out that there are "very few comprehensive technology-based curricula that fully take advantage of the power of available tech-

nologies" (p. 22). More recent tools such as interpersonal audio discussions allow a combination of audio, video, images, and text. Ferriter (2011) noted that multimedia tools such as interpersonal audio discussions similar to VoiceThread <http://www.voicethread.com> are useful in increasing input by extending discussions originally launched in the classroom setting. Gilakjani, Ismail, and Ahmadi (2011) highlighted the benefits of multi-modal learning and how they were incorporated into computer assisted language learning. For example, Mayer and Moreno (2003) found through their research on reducing cognitive demands in multimedia learning that the combination of narration and video was more effective in student learning than narration alone. Similarly, words and images presented simultaneously were more effective than words and pictures that appear sequentially. In other words, multimedia tools are found to be most beneficial to learners when content is not visually far apart, or split, on the screen. Mayer (2005) later described that multimedia presentations were more effective because learners had the ability to interact with the presentation by controlling the pace and content. According to Ferriter, creators of interpersonal audio discussion conversations upload content in the form of images, text, or video; this content then operates as a point of departure for asynchronous discussions where users can then add their own content or comment on the existing conversation. The interpersonal audio discussion design allows a full discussion to be captured not only on one page, but within one diagram as well. Because many interpersonal audio discussion products are multimodal, differing learning styles can be accommodated, allowing users to choose their preferred method of expression

In the present study, interpersonal audio discussions were selected to deliver collaborative activities, to observe students' pronunciation development, and to track fluctuations in WTC variables during the process. The features of interpersonal audio discussions appear to meet several criteria listed by Dörnyei (1994) as strategies used to motivate language learners. At the language level, the community-oriented nature of interpersonal audio discussions is conducive to promoting student contact with other L2 speakers. At the learners' level, the ability to practice and then save recorded discussions in one place assists learners in developing self-confidence and builds on strategies for improving learner self-efficacy in the L2. Another affordance of interpersonal audio discussions that is notable is requiring learners to contribute personal and novel ideas to the discussions, a feature promoting group cohesion and intermember relations (Dörnyei, 1994) because it allows students to "get to know each another and share genuine personal information" (p. 282). Furthermore, interpersonal audio discussions are cooperative learning activities, thus adding potential motivational stimulants to the L2 classroom by contributing to group cohesion and group success in addition to reflecting collaborative, participatory environments well-known to today's students due to the influence of social media (Dörnyei, 1994; Kessler, 2013)

Finally, interpersonal audio discussions are practical in pronunciation training because of the ability to access the software from any web browser and some mobile devices. Mobile learning technologies are defined as "familiar, personal, universal, non-intrusive, lightweight, and cheap" (Salmon & Edirisingha, 2007, p. 18), thus allowing mobile technologies to thrive in a range of social settings. In Kessler's (2010) study concerning fluency, anxiety, and the use of mobile devices for audio recording, results showed that students who recorded themselves using mobile MP3 players per-

formed slightly better in fluency. Furthermore, Kessler noted that "the environment of the audio laboratory influences some students to speak in a low volume that compromised the perceived quality of their speech" (p. 370). With mobile devices, students can avoid a laboratory setting if so desired and record when and where they feel most comfortable. In support of Kessler's findings, Ferriter (2011) added that interpersonal audio discussions not only permit students to work collaboratively at their convenience and from any Internet-connected device, but they also enable students to refine their thought process and potential contributions to the discussion before sharing ideas publicly. For beginning or intermediate language learners, the ability to complete an oral exchange at leisure induces active listening, equal participation among learner types, and a low-stress environment (Hunter, 2012)

Taken collectively, the review of the literature shows that there are few studies that have focused on L2 learners' pronunciation development in online, social settings facilitated through emerging technologies in addition to studying how participation in these environments affects linguistic and psychological processes represented by WTC. I use the term *pronunciation development* because this study does not focus merely on pronunciation proficiency, but also on the process and progress of developing proficiency monitored by students' feelings and other affective factors (e.g. emotional reactions such as anxiety and self-confidence). Therefore, the present study was designed in order to expand upon the discussion regarding audio technologies as pedagogical tools and to observe their effects on WTC and students' pronunciation. Understanding the process of improving pronunciation and elements affecting that progression as studied through the WTC framework were the main goals of the study. At the same time, the research intends to inform others concerning the use of audio discussions in L2 classrooms. Consequently, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How does participation in interpersonal audio discussions affect variables influencing WTC?

2. What are the effects of participation in interpersonal audio discussions on the development of students' pronunciation skills in introductory French courses?

## Methods

A mixed methods research design gathered both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously (Heigham & Croker, 2009). The instruments include: pre- and exit-questionnaires, student SA forms and journals, and feedback provided to the student from the instructor. However, this article will focus primarily on the results gleaned from the analysis of the data collected from the SA forms (Appendix A) completed by students after participating in each of the three interpersonal audio discussion activities. Qualitative findings from Journal 3 (Appendix B) are also presented as a means to illustrate the quantitative results.

**Setting and participants.** Participants in the study were enrolled in three sections of second-semester French that met five times a week over one semester at the University of Alabama during the fall semester of 2012. Participants were not

compensated monetarily but rather earned credit towards the homework grade in their course as a result of their completion of the interpersonal audio discussion and SA activities (Appendix C, first in French and then in English). All students participated in the interpersonal audio discussion activities; however, I collected data from only the consenting participants. The participant sample was comprised of 17 male and 22 female students, ranging in age from 19 to 25 years old. Two students who had spent extensive periods of time in French-speaking countries and reported having extended family members with whom they spoke the target language were identified as outliers. Although neither of the students considered themselves native French speakers or proficient speakers, they were eliminated from the sample, which reduced the total number of participants to 37. Eleven (30%) participants were true beginners, and the remaining 26 participants were false beginners who reported studying French in high school. The majority of students (62%) had studied only French in previous language courses. Approximately one-third (35%) of the participants planned to major or minor in French, and 15 participants (41%) hoped to use French in their future careers.

**Role of instructors.** Two graduate teaching assistant instructors taught the participating classes. Both instructors were native speakers of English and followed the syllabus established by the department. Before participating in any activities, instructors assisted participants during class time concerning technical matters such as: how to access VoiceThread (VT) accounts, how to open VT activities, and how to record and comment in the VTs. The instructors continued to serve as guides throughout the semester, reminding students of due dates and distributing activities (in addition to assignments being posted in the course delivery system) as well as providing students with pronunciation-specific feedback after their participation in each of the three VT activities (Appendix D). Instructors used the results from this form to award a portion of the credit earned towards this assignment in the course. Students earned the remaining points for each activity through completion of the self-evaluation activities and full participation in the audio discussion activities. The instructors based their ratings solely on the participants' pronunciation as it pertained to the categories, which were adapted from Ducate and Lomicka's (2009) podcasting study. However, a comprehensibility section and an open-ended notes section allowed the instructor to address any other necessary issues.

**Interpersonal audio discussion activities and procedures.** Participation in the interpersonal audio discussion activities was not limited to logging into each VT activity, but included two different reflective activities as well. The reflective activities involved completing a SA form in class and journal entry online that occurred after the participants' involvement in each of the three VT activities and after they reviewed feedback regarding their pronunciation performance from their instructor. Using Brandl's (2002) suggestions as a model, the activities were broken down into three phases: brainstorming, initial participation, and interaction with classmates. The first deadline typically required some initial brainstorming (Step 1) followed by participating in the activity by leaving recorded comments (Step 2). The second deadline allowed time for the students to react to those initial comments by continuing to comment and interact with other VT users by asking and responding to questions (Step 3). As part of the VT2 and VT3 activities, activity guidelines instructed

students during Step 3 to visit other users' VTs within their class and ask questions or comment in order to initiate conversation and interact rather than just work within their own group. In addition to providing two separate deadlines, the guidelines provided students with a checklist feature on the activity page in their native language that listed the tasks required to complete the activity before each deadline.

To summarize the activity details, VT1 required participants to work individually first to answer some personal questions, give a physical description, and then introduce themselves to their classmates. Once they had access to basic information about one another through the VT group conversation, they posed additional, more specific questions to their small group members such as finding out which sports others played or what they liked to do on the weekends. The activity in Appendix C represents the second activity completed by students mid-way during the semester. Although the interpersonal audio discussions were not focused on grammatical points, this activity was centered on a familiar topic they were currently covering in the course, the use of two past tenses in French, the passé composé and the imparfait. In this activity, participants described a fictitious weekend that they spent with a celebrity or notable person. After completing these first steps, participants were then directed to pre-loaded VT activities, which prompted them to talk about a prior weekend based around the person and images I chose to place within the interpersonal audio discussions. For example, images in one activity prompted the subjects to imagine that they visited the White House during winter and played basketball with the President. As an additional step to VT2, participants not only took part in their own small-group conversations, but then also visited other VTs within the class to ask questions and interact with more classmates. Finally, in the third and final VT, the participants worked together to upload their own images, text, and comments to a VT conversation that required them to plan a vacation and discuss activities associated with their selected destination. This was the only activity that required participants to create, edit, and upload to VT. In short, I selected this technology because of its ability (a) to meet certain multimedia criteria as detailed in the literature review and (b) to accommodate the communicatively based activities I had designed.

**Student self-evaluation.** Participants completed the SA form after participating in each of the three activities and after having read the instructor's feedback concerning specific aspects of the students' abilities in pronunciation such as accuracy, fluency, comprehensibility, and overall performance. The SA form was completed easily during the last five minutes of class. MacIntyre (2007) pointed out that adapting to anxiety can often be a coping process and may be sensitive to fluctuations over short periods of time; therefore, the student SA forms assisted in establishing shifts in WTC contributors throughout the semester such as: anxiety, perceived performance, and self-confidence.

I created the first and second parts of the SA form specifically for the present study. In Part 1, participants ranked themselves using the same categories presented on the feedback form they received from the instructor. I adapted those categories from the grading rubric used in Ducate and Lomicka's (2009) podcasting study. Participants used these categories to compare their own pronunciation abilities with how they viewed their classmates' abilities. Student perceptions were indicated by the use of a symbols rating system. The minus sign represented *less competent than*

*my peers*, the equal sign represented *equal or about the same as my peers*, and the plus sign represented *more competent than my peers*. In Part 2 of the SA form, participants reported changes in variables relating to WTC in connection with their own pronunciation. In this case, the minus sign represented the verb *decreased*, the equal sign meant *remained the same / no change*, and the plus sign represented the verb *increased*. By using these verbs, participants indicated on five questionnaire items their feelings and perceptions regarding the VT activity and reported any changes in the following categories: perceived performance, confidence, anxiety, desire to improve, and overall pronunciation skills.

I quantified data from this instrument by assigning a numerical score to each symbol. The plus sign corresponded to a score of 2, the equal sign to 1, and the minus sign to zero. Because the participants completed this form more than once during the semester, quantifying the data allowed for it to be analyzed through repeated measures tests and through exploring relationships between the variables represented on the instrument at different points during the participants' experience in the interpersonal audio discussions. The categories in Part 2 of the SA form are discussed in this article as they each relate to a variable in the WTC model (MacIntyre et al., 1998). For this section specifically, the scores were totaled in order to represent a measurable value of change in students' WTC, a methodology derived from Elliott's (1995) analysis of the pronunciation attitude inventory where negatively worded items were reversed in order to represent the highest possible score and a positive attitude, and lowest scores were assigned to the most negative attitudes.

I adapted Part 3 of the SA form from Saint Léger and Storch's (2009) SA questionnaire items that tapped into participants' perceived strengths and weaknesses in oral skills. This section also permitted participants to reflect upon their experience and identify areas of improvement. Through completion of this section, participants gauged how difficult or how easy they perceived pronunciation demands. Next, in Part 4 of the SA form, participants determined the strongest and weakest points of their VT contributions. They were able to choose from pronunciation accuracy, fluency, or comprehensibility, the same categories used in instructor feedback forms and in the comparison task with their classmates on Part 1. Finally, participants assigned a grade to their work that indicated perceived performance and also discussed specific steps they would take in the future to improve on weaknesses in their pronunciation - items that were also adapted from Saint Léger and Storch's study and assisted in the students' continued self-evaluation of their VT contributions. In addition to the completion of the SA form after each activity, participants responded freely to a journal prompt presented through the course management system as a means to allow participants to continuously self-evaluate and to articulate their experiences and thoughts in their own words.

## Results

**Effects on WTC.** With regard to the first research question concerning the effects of participation in interpersonal audio discussions on variables influencing WTC, results from a Wilcoxon signed-rank test comparing participants' overall scores from Part 2 of the SA form that addressed WTC variables over the course of the semester are presented in Table 1. One student did not complete the first SA

form; this student's data were excluded in the analysis of all SA forms (*n* = 36). The results revealed that the majority of participants experienced unchanged or increased WTC after each activity. Although the Wilcoxon signed-rank test did not produce any results indicating significant changes in WTC levels, these figures demonstrated that over the course of the semester, the majority of participants did not experience any negative effects in WTC as a result of participating in the interpersonal audio discussions; in fact, some participants began experiencing positive changes in WTC.

**Table 1**

*Perceived changes in WTC.*

|  |  |  |
|---|---|---|
| VT1 → VT2 | Increase | 39% |
|  | Decrease | 25% |
|  | No change | 36% |
| VT2 → VT3 | Increase | 28% |
|  | Decrease | 33% |
|  | No change | 39% |
| VT1 → VT3 | Increase | 28% |
|  | Decrease | 25% |
|  | No change | 47% |

Next, I conducted correlational analysis on the changes in participants' WTC. Results showed statistically significant correlations among the variables, providing support for the use of interpersonal audio discussions to focus on pronunciation skills and to positively influence WTC. The test revealed positive relationships between individual influences and overall WTC in all three VT activities. For example, at the onset of the study, L2 related confidence and overall WTC were positively associated (*r* = .70, *p* < .001). Although all variables represented by Part 2 of the SA form were positively associated with overall WTC in the results of the Pearson's correlation test, participants' motivation, perceived performance, and self-confidence revealed the most notable relationships with overall WTC in VT2 resulting in correlation coefficients ranging from .69 to .75 (*p* < .001). Similarly, at the end of the semester, correlation coefficients ranged from .69 to .82 (*p* < .001), demonstrating that the same individual variables were most strongly associated with participants' reported WTC after VT3. Additional tests carried out on the cumulative WTC scores from each of the VT activities demonstrated that participants' overall WTC from VT1 was strongly correlated with their reported overall WTC in VT2 and VT3 (*r* = .64, *p* < .001) indicating that interpersonal audio discussions were successful in maintaining favorable WTC levels over an extended period of time.

In summary, all correlations were positive, meaning that as one variable increased, the second variable also increased, indicated by the scores assigned by the participants during self-evaluation. These results showed that participants who felt positively about their overall performance in VT activities also reported high levels of confidence after their participation. This trend continued, indicated by positive

correlations across all activities, and revealed that when participants reported a favorable perception of overall performance at the beginning of the semester, they also reported high scores on overall perceived performance in later activities. Participants who reported higher scores regarding perceived improvements in self-confidence after initial participation in VT1 also noted that anxiety levels lessened and confidence ameliorated over the course of the semester. The tests, therefore, confirmed that there was not an inverse or negative association between interpersonal audio discussions and variables influencing WTC. In fact, all individual factors (perceptions of pronunciation skills, motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety) were positively correlated to overall WTC during participation in the interpersonal audio discussion activities in addition to statistically significant correlations between overall WTC from activity to activity.

**Effects on pronunciation skills.** In order to address the second research question and determine how the development of pronunciation skills was affected by participation in interpersonal audio discussions in introductory French courses, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was performed on students' SAs which uncovered further support regarding the affective benefits of the online discussions. The test revealed that between the first and final VT activity, the audio discussion activities elicited a statistically significant change in perceived ability in regards to pronunciation skills ($Z = -2.321$, $p < .05$). Students' perceptions of ability concerning pronunciation skills when making comparisons with peers (from Part 1) had improved after the final VT activity. In addition, the mean score from this section of the SA improved from 4.00 after VT1 to 4.58 after VT3. In this case, students used the rating system made up of symbols; thus, the frequency of higher scores meant that they used the equal sign and plus sign more often to indicate that they felt that their performance was about the same or more competent than their peers in regards to accuracy, fluency, comprehensibility, and overall performance in VT3, demonstrating positive influences to WTC. Comments reflected students' efforts and feelings of positivity regarding their participation in interpersonal audio discussions to focus on pronunciation skills. For example, a student reported in the journal, "My classmates' responses were helpful because they allowed me to see how other French students performed in French pronunciation. I would try to mimic those students who had impressive pronunciation skills." Another student commented, "Knowing that they're [*sic*] responses and contributions to the activities were dependent upon how well they could understand what I was saying motivated me to speak clearly and with the best pronunciation that I am capable of." With regard to pronunciation specifically, students noted a decrease in perceived level of difficulty concerning pronunciation-specific tasks on Part 3 of the student SA form. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed notable differences between VT1 and VT3 from Part 3. The test revealed that 15 of the 36 participating students (42%) reported less difficulty regarding comprehensibility, the ability to speak in a clear and understandable manner that requires little or no interpretation on the part of the listener, and reached significance ($Z = -2.120$, $p < .05$). One-third (33%) of students noted that efforts in achieving accuracy, or imitating and producing a French pronunciation when speaking, seemed less difficult between VT1 and VT3 ($Z = -2.134$, $p < .05$).

On each student SA form, participants also listed what they believed to be their strength and their weakness concerning participation on the corresponding VT activity from the following choices: accuracy (ability to produce French sounds), fluency (naturalness and rate of speech), and comprehensibility (how much was understood). Approximately half of the participants consistently ranked the category of comprehensibility as a strength rather than a weakness on the SA over the duration of the semester: 20 participants (56%) in VT1 and 15 (42%) in VT2. The results of the previously mentioned Wilcoxon signed-rank tests showed that there was a surge in confidence regarding comprehensibility near the end of the study with 19 participants (53%) reporting it as their strength. Similarly, fewer students reported difficulty in perceived ability to imitate a French accent, demonstrated by a steady decline in the fluency category being listed as a weakness (decreased 17% in VT3 from VT1). Weakness rankings remained unchanged for the category of accuracy between VT1 and VT3 (31%). Participants overwhelmingly described *good* pronunciation and the person they tried to imitate in the journals as having smooth and fluid speech, which may explain changes in the fluency category rather than in accuracy. These results reflected the Pearson correlations previously reported and substantiated the conclusion that the implementation of interpersonal audio discussions had positive effects on the factors influencing WTC and on pronunciation development among learners in introductory classrooms.

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore interpersonal audio discussions and their effectiveness, measured through students' self-reported WTC and perceived pronunciation abilities throughout their participation in the activities. In this study, the implementation of the interpersonal audio discussions through VT afforded students the opportunity to receive focused practice in spoken language and pronunciation. Continued participation in audio discussions and SA also presented student-centered, communicative activities that focused on the development of pronunciation skills.

The first research question sought to determine what the effects of interpersonal audio discussions such as VT are on WTC. The results showed that some students experienced increased WTC as a result of participation in the interpersonal audio discussion activities that were coupled with a feedback-supported environment and facilitated through self-evaluation techniques established in prior research (Murakami et al., 2012; Saint Léger & Storch, 2009; Smit, 2002). Analysis of the Pearson correlation tests demonstrated that participation in the initial audio discussion activity had a prolonged effect on WTC until the end of the semester, a result that supports Arnold's (2007) findings that the affective benefits of computer-mediated communication (CMC) manifest themselves long-term rather than merely being experienced temporarily during the few moments of actively participating in CMC. This is evidenced by the positive associations found in overall WTC after participation in all three VT activities. Because of the multiple statistically significant correlations between individual WTC variables and overall WTC, the results demonstrated that (a) interpersonal audio discussions can effectively be used to promote WTC and (b) that participants are likely to experience sustained or increased WTC with ongoing participation.

The second research question sought to determine the effects of participation in interpersonal audio discussions on the development of students' pronunciation skills. The results of the study revealed that students perceived pronunciation tasks to be less difficult at the end of the semester and reported higher self-confidence and estimations of their overall performance in the oral VT activities. Although the repeated measures test revealed that more participants experienced unchanged overall WTC (47%) rather than increased WTC (28%) at the end of the semester in VT3, statistically significant correlations between the individual variables of WTC in the three SA forms demonstrated the positive effects of continued participation and evaluation of progress on WTC and students' perceptions of pronunciation skills. However, it is debatable that the development of pronunciation is unrelated to WTC. Nevertheless, MacIntyre and Doucette (2010) pointed out that modern pedagogical methods stress practice in speaking in order to learn the L2, thus students who take advantage of opportunities to communicate and have a higher WTC increase their chances in speaking, L2 learning, and an improved proficiency. The data in the present study indicated that continued participation in the audio discussions reflected positive changes in WTC variables and the students' perceptions of their pronunciation abilities. Therefore, when collectively considering the results, the use of interpersonal audio discussions for pronunciation development appears promising.

There are several implications of this study for CLT classrooms comprised of introductory L2 learners. First, results support the notion that interpersonal audio discussions such as VT are useful classroom supplements for pronunciation development. Derwing and Munro (2005) noted that presenting pronunciation to students should be preceded by the exploration of venues for pronunciation instruction that best meet students' needs. Because WTC is a reflection of self-confidence, motivation, and desire to communicate with others (MacIntyre et al., 1998), the results of the present study qualify interpersonal audio discussions as an appropriate tool for students learning pronunciation. Furthermore, the VT technology specifically offers free or affordable paid accounts, and there is no software to download as it is web-based which may benefit educators with limited funds and resources. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of the need for activities that focus solely on spoken language followed by feedback that also accomplish the communicative goals of today's L2 classrooms. The participating instructors in the study agreed in an exit interview that although the interpersonal audio discussion activities did not explicitly teach rules of French pronunciation, they felt that their students developed an awareness of pronunciation that they would not have had otherwise because pronunciation is not a large focus in the introductory curriculum.

As with empirical studies, there are limitations in the present study. While the data evidenced positive gains in WTC and students' perceptions of pronunciation skills through the use of interpersonal audio discussions as a means to present pronunciation in introductory classrooms, the results may not be generalized among all populations, for example more advanced learners or learners in exclusively online settings. In addition, although the response rate was high, I surveyed a small number of students. Also, there was not a control group in the study that would determine if a non-participating introductory classroom would experience the same results. The study included extensive instructor- and self-evaluation as part of participation in

the activities. Therefore, the practicality and effectiveness of using interpersonal audio discussions as casual supplements without feedback or assessment is uncertain. These limitations, however, reveal opportunities for future research in the area. It would be of interest to study this emerging technology in online L2 courses in order to determine useful activities and tools for reaching desired outcomes in the learning of pronunciation in this unique setting. In particular, it may be beneficial to introduce interpersonal audio discussions in environments where pronunciation learning holds a larger stake in the curriculum, such as a phonetics course, in order to expand upon the role of interpersonal audio discussions in L2 education. It is also important to note that the data presented in this article were self-reported, thus conducting observations or a case study may provide new perspectives on this topic.

As pointed out in the introduction, CLT classrooms continue to evolve and offer both form-focused and meaning-based instruction (Larsen-Freeman 2007; Spada 2007; Savignon, 2007). This notion has been applied in the present study to the development of pronunciation skills. Although the study has certain limitations, it does explore an emerging technology that delivers both form-focused and meaning-based activities with a focus on pronunciation and builds upon previous research. Additionally, positive changes in students' WTC highlight the fact that early pronunciation learning and the development of pronunciation skills can be accomplished in introductory classrooms with lasting effects. It is intended that the data and insight gained from this research study will serve the purpose of continuing to inform instructors and those within the field about practices in pronunciation teaching and learning.

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**Appendix A**

**VoiceThread Self-Assessment Form**

Date: _____

VoiceThread# (circle one):         Practice #1         #2         #3

My VoiceThread ID: _____

**Part 1:** Use the symbols provided below to self-evaluate your performance in the VoiceThread by comparing it to that of your peers.

> – (minus sign) → less competent than my peers
>
> = (equal sign) → equal with or about the same as my peers
>
> + (plus sign) → more competent than my peers

When comparing myself to my peers in the VoiceThread….

1. The accuracy (specific vowel/consonant sounds) of my pronunciation in French is _____.
2. My fluency (speed/pauses) when speaking is _____.
3. My comprehensibility (able to be understood) when speaking is _____.
4. My overall performance in the VoiceThread is _____.

**Part 2:** Use the symbols provided below to express your feelings regarding this particular VoiceThread experience.

> – (minus sign) → decreased
>
> = (equal sign) → remained the same / no change
>
> + (plus sign) → increased

1. I believe that my pronunciation skills have _____ from participating in this week's VoiceThread.
2. Communicating and working with others through VoiceThreads contributed to a/an _____ desire to improve my pronunciation.
3. Knowing that peers are listening to my VoiceThread resulted in _____ performance in my pronunciation today.
4. My participation in this week's VoiceThread resulted in _____ confidence regarding my pronunciation skills.
5. Feelings of anxiety regarding my pronunciation have _____ after participating in this week's VoiceThread.

**Part 3:** Use the symbols provided below to express how easy or how difficult it was to participate in the VoiceThread.

　　– (minus sign) → difficult or very difficult

　　= (equal sign) → ok, somewhat challenging

　　+ (plus sign) → easy or very easy

1. It is _____ for me to speak fluently with little hesitation and pausing.

2. It is _____ for me to speak in a clear and understandable manner that requires little or no interpretation on the part of the listener.

3. It is _____ for me to imitate and produce a French pronunciation when speaking.

4. It is _____ for me to relax and have fun while performing an oral task in French.

5. It is _____ for me to be excited and willing to participate in the Voice-Thread activity.

**Part 4:** Answer the following short answer questions by sharing your personal responses.

1. What was the ***strongest*** point in this VT contribution concerning your pronunciation? Check one item.

　　_____　accuracy (ability to produce French sounds)

　　_____　fluency (naturalness and rate of speech)

　　_____　comprehensibility (how much was understood)

2. What was the ***weakest*** point in this VT contribution concerning your pronunciation? Check one item.

　　_____　accuracy (ability to produce French sounds)

　　_____　fluency (naturalness and rate of speech)

　　_____　comprehensibility (how much was understood)

3. What do you plan to do specifically to focus on an area of improvement concerning your pronunciation?

　　_____

4. If you had to give yourself a grade based on your overall pronunciation on this VoiceThread contribution, what would it be?

　　Circle one.　　> 90%　　　　80-89%　　　　70-70%　　　　< 70%

**Appendix B**

**Journal 3 Prompt**

Please complete the journaling activity AFTER you have received feedback from your instructor on the activity (VT 3) and you have completed the self-assessment form in class. Please use a minimum of 50 words, clearly explain your point of view or opinion, and respond in English. The table below represents a list of features you accessed when using VoiceThread in your French class. Please read over the features and then respond to BOTH letters A and B.

    **A.** During your experience using VoiceThread, did one of these features motivate you at all to improve your pronunciation skills? Why?

    **B.** During your experience using VoiceThread, did any of these features have a negative impact on your motivation to improve your pronunciation skills? Why?

**Features of VoiceThread**

    1. Having an assignment that allowed me to focus only on spoken language as a means of expression

    2. Knowing that my peers would listen to my contributions

    3. Using emerging technology to show my competency in French

    4. Using images to help get my point across

    5. Collaborating with my peers to create an original VoiceThread

    6. Being able to easily listen to my classmates' recordings in the VoiceThread format

    7. Knowing that my instructor would give feedback on my contributions

    8. Using images to better understand my peers' contributions

    9. Engaging in oral speaking practice with peers outside of the classroom

    10. Having another outlet to listen to and express myself in French

**Appendix C**

**Sample Interpersonal Audio Discussion Activity**

VoiceThread Activité 2, l'imparfait et le passé composé
    Deadline 1:
    Deadline 2:

**Étape 1**

Pour compléter cette activité, votre prof va désigner des groupes. Vous allez participer à votre groupe de VoiceThread mais vous allez travailler individuellement aussi.

D'abord, imaginez que vous avez passé un week-end formidable avec la star de vos rêves. Comment était le week-end ? Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait?

Maintenant, regardez ce clip:

*http://goanimate.com/videos/0NnfTGpxHT5c?utm_source=linkshare*

Ensuite, choisissez une star que vous aimez et racontez votre week-end et distinguez entre le passé composé et l'imparfait. Enfin, organisez vos idées dans le tableau suivant (travail individuel).

| Un week-end avec… Qui est-ce? | le passé composé | l'imparfait |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Comment était-il/elle ? | | |
| 2) Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ? | | |
| 3) Quel temps faisait-il ? | | |
| 4) De quoi est-ce que vous avez parlé ? | | |
| 5) Où est-ce que c'était ? (chez vous ? au restaurant ?) | | |
| 6) C'est à vous de choisir un souvenir particulier associé à ce week-end extraordinaire! | | |

**Étape 2**

Allez sur votre site VoiceThread qui correspond à cette activité. Imaginez que vous avez passé le week-end avec cette personne célèbre. Votre groupe va travailler ensemble pour inventer l'histoire complète. Commentez au moins 3 fois et faites référence au tableau que vous avez créé pour ajouter des détails et parler de ce week-end extraordinaire (travail individuel). Employez le passé composé et l'imparfait selon le contexte.

*Modèle : Kim (Kardashian) et moi avons fait du shopping dans la rue Rodeo. Il faisait beau en Californie mais Kim était fatiguée et désagréable. Nous avons dépensé beaucoup d'argent.*

Before Deadline 1:

☐ Did you imagine your ideal weekend with your favorite celebrity?

☐ Did you visit your group's VoiceThread and find out which celebrity you met over the weekend?

☐ Did you add at least 3 details in the *passé composé* or the *imparfait* to the slides in the VoiceThread to help build the story of an extraordinary weekend?

**Étape 3**

Votre professeur va désigner un autre groupe et votre groupe va travailler avec ce groupe. D'abord, visitez le VoiceThread de l'autre groupe. Puis, chaque membre de votre groupe pose au moins deux (2) questions. Voici quelques possibilités pour vous aider:

- Comment étaient les ami(e)s de _____ ?
- Qu'est-ce que vous aimiez / vous n'aimiez pas ?
- Quand vous êtes arrivé(e)(s), _____ a été surpris(e) / était heureux(se) ?
- La famille de _____ était comment ?
- Vous avez téléphoné à votre famille pour raconter le week-end ?

Enfin, allez sur votre site VoiceThread et répondez à au moins une question faite par vos visiteurs.

    Before Deadline 2:

- ☐ Did you listen to another group's VoiceThread?
- ☐ Did you leave at least 2 recorded questions with your microphone or webcam?
- ☐ Did you listen to comments left within your own VoiceThread and respond?

*English Translation:*

*VoiceThread Activity 2, the imperfect and the compound past*

*Deadline 1:*

*Deadline 2:*

**Step 1**

*To complete this activity, your professor will assign groups. You will participate in your VoiceThread group, but you will also work individually. First, imagine that you spent an amazing weekend with the celebrity of your dreams. What was the weekend like? What did you do?*

*Now, watch this video clip:*

*http://goanimate.com/videos/0NnfTGpxHT5c?utm_source=linkshare*

*Next, choose a celebrity that you like and tell about your weekend, distinguishing between the compound past and the imperfect. Finally, organize your thoughts in the table below (individual work).*

| A weekend with… Who is it? | Compound Past | Imperfect |
|---|---|---|
| 1) What was he/she like? | | |
| 2) What happened? | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3) What was the weather like? | | |
| 4) What did you talk about? | | |
| 5) Where were you (at your house? at a restaurant?) | | |
| 6) It's up to you to choose a particular memory that reminds you of this extraordinary weekend! | | |

**Step 2**

*Go to the VoiceThread site that corresponds to this activity. Imagine that you spent the weekend with this celebrity. Your group will work together to invent a story. Leave at least 3 comments and reference the table that you completed to help add details and talk about your amazing weekend (individual work). Use the compound past and the imperfect depending on the context.*

> *Model: Kim (Kardashian) and I went shopping on Rodeo Drive. It was a nice day in California but Kim was tired and unpleasant. We spent lots of money.*

> *Before Deadline 1:*

> ☐ *Did you imagine your ideal weekend with your favorite celebrity?*

> ☐ *Did you visit your group's VoiceThread and find out which celebrity you met over the weekend?*

> ☐ *Did you add at least 3 details in the compound past or the imperfect to the slides in the VoiceThread to help build the story of an extraordinary weekend?*

**Step 3**

*Your professor will assign another group, and your group will work with this group. First, visit the other group's VoiceThread. Then, each member of your group asks at least 2 questions. Here are some suggestions to help you:*

- *What were _____'s friends like?*
- *What did you like / dislike?*
- *When you arrived, was _____ surprised / happy?*
- *What was _____'s family like?*
- *Did you call your family to tell them about the weekend?*

*Finally, go back to your VoiceThread and respond to at least one question left by your visitors.*

> *Before Deadline 2:*

> ☐ *Did you listen to another group's VoiceThread?*

☐ *Did you leave at least 2 recorded questions with your microphone or webcam?*

☐ *Did you listen to comments left within your own VoiceThread and respond?*

## Appendix D

**VoiceThread Instructor Feedback Form**

VoiceThread# (circle one)        #1                #2                #3

Student name: _____

**This form is for instructor use only**. Please keep all pages attached. Use the scale below to rate each item in the tables. You will then assign an overall score for Parts 1-3.

+ (plus sign) → above average          = (equal sign) → average
– (minus sign) → below average

### Part 1

**Pronunciation accuracy:** production of French vowel and consonant sounds

| Category: | Rating: |
|---|---|
| Silent letters (e.g., final consonants) | |
| L'enchaînement | |
| Liaison | |
| Nasal vowels | |
| Other (please explain): | |

**Overall Score Part 1:**   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10
10 = no or few errors in pronunciation, 1 = meaning unclear due to abundance of pronunciation errors

### Part 2

**Pronunciation fluency:** rate and naturalness of speech

| Category: | Rating: |
|---|---|
| Rate of speech | |
| Normal pausing* | |
| Intonation | |
| Articulation | |
| Stress/rhythm | |
| Other (please explain): | |

*Normal pausing is under 3 seconds (Riggenbach, 1991)

**Overall Score Part 2:**  1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9     10
10 = natural flow with little or no starts and stops, 1 = many hesitations and recording sounds "read aloud"

## Part 3

**Comprehensibility:** how much was understood?
Instructors: provide score and leave comments when necessary.

**Overall Score Part 3:**  1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9     10
10 = extremely easy to understand and readily comprehensible requiring no interpretation on the part of the listener, 1 = impossible to understand

Comments/Notes:

## Part 4

### Overall Assessment
### Teacher comments and notes:

**Final Score: _____ / 30 points**

Instructors: total ratings from Parts 1–3 to calculate final score.

# 5

# Perception of a Regional Spanish Sound: The Case of /s/-weakening

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*Abstract*

*While taking foreign language classes or interacting in the target language community, language learners will be exposed to dialectal differences. This paper addresses how adult learners of Spanish in beginning, intermediate, and advanced Spanish courses at a large US university perceived a common sociolinguistic feature of Spanish, /s/-weakening, which can vary for stylistic, gender, and geographical reasons. The implications for teaching and learning foreign languages will be addressed, noting the importance of teaching common sociolinguistic features that are salient to native speakers but less salient to second language learners.*

## Background

Learners of foreign languages are often exposed to many different varieties, or dialects, of the language. They often have a variety of instructors, many of whom may speak different regional varieties of the target language (TL). In addition, they may be exposed to a variety of TL dialects in required online activities and in-class activities involving listening comprehension skills. Students who study abroad are also exposed to the language variety of the area where they study. Is study abroad necessary to perceive these features? Why is it important to perceive these features? Is it possible to perceive them based on exposure in the classroom? What is the role of proficiency level? The present study addresses these questions by investigating Spanish university students' perception of /s/-weakening, a common phonological feature found in many varieties of Spanish. This phenomenon, when the /s/ at the end of a syllable is weakened, either deleted or aspirated, is common in up to 50% of the varieties of spoken Spanish (Hammond, 2001). An example of /s/-weakening is /pahta/ or /pata/ instead of /pasta/. Native speakers of non /s/-weakening dialects are capable of understanding each other, although with longer response times than native speakers from /s/-weakening varieties (Boomershine, 2006). Less is known about how students of Spanish perceive /s/-weakening.

The current research investigates native English speakers' perception of /s/-weakening in beginning, intermediate, and advanced Spanish courses in order to determine if and how these second language (L2) Spanish learners perceive /s/-weakening (e.g., the 's' in '*pasta*'). In other words, do they perceive the /s/ as deleted (/*paØta*/), as an [h] (/*pahta*/), as an [s] (/*pasta*/), or as some other sound (*pafta*/) when it is aspirated or deleted?

**Review of the Literature**

/S/-weakening is widespread throughout the Spanish-speaking world, with millions of Spanish speakers aspirating or deleting /s/ on a regular basis. In Venezuela /s/-weakening is the norm, especially in higher social classes where it is considered a prestige marker. Both syllable and word-final /s/ is aspirated or deleted (Lipski, 1994).

Having knowledge of /s/-weakening means attaining more sociolinguistic competence, which forms a part of language competence (Bachman, 1990). Sociolinguistic competence includes sensitivity to dialects and their registers. "[A] key component to sociolinguistic competence is knowing how to vary one's language (and interpret language one hears or reads) according to the social context" (Geeslin, 2011, p. 501). Learners of any foreign language benefit from the ability to understand the variety of TL dialects they are faced with both inside and outside the classroom.

Learners of Spanish may have difficulty perceiving /s/-weakening, because it does not occur in English. The sound often associated with /s/-weakening is /h/. While /h/ occurs in English (e.g., the 'h' in 'has'), it is never possible for it to occur at the end of a syllable in English.

In Spanish, /h/ is a variant of /s/-weakening, meaning that /h/ is a sound used when speakers weaken their /s/ (e.g., */pahta/* instead of */pasta/*). The reason native English speakers may have difficulties perceiving /s/-weakening could be because /h/ is not a variant of /s/ in English (McMahon, 2002). For example, in English one would not say /duht/ to mean /dust/. Native English speakers may not associate, at first, /s/-weakening with [h]. Four recent studies elucidate the claim that Spanish language students are shown to perceive /s/ aspiration in a different manner from native Spanish speakers.

The first study conducted by Schmidt (2009), found that 11 adult students of varying Spanish proficiency levels, as determined via a written grammatical proficiency test, were able to improve their comprehension of Dominican Spanish speakers while staying in the Dominican Republic for three weeks. Their progress was measured with a listening comprehension task prior to and directly after the students went abroad, in which they were asked to write the word or phrase heard in Spanish and provide the English equivalent. This aural speech sample included four regional features—/s/-weakening, intervocalic /d/ weakening (i.e., the deletion of 'd' between vowels as in '*hablao*' instead of '*hablado*'), lambdacism (i.e., the pronunciation of 'r' as 'l' as in '*puelto*' instead of '*puerto*'), and /n/-velarization (i.e., the pronunciation of 'n' at the end of a word as velar instead of nasal as in '*pang*' instead of '*pan*'). Although the students were consistently able to understand Spanish speakers from Costa Rica, Spain, and Colombia significantly better than Dominican Spanish speakers, their three-week stay nonetheless resulted in increased comprehension of the Dominican dialect.

The effects of instruction on the perception of Andalusian Spanish, or the Spanish spoken in the region of Andaluz in Southern Spain, were measured by Rasmussen and Zampini (2010). Ten native English-speaking participants in an experimental group received six half-hour training sessions on four dialectal phonetic features of Andalusian Spanish, one of which was /s/-weakening, over the course of

six weeks while studying abroad in Seville, Spain. Six native English-speaking participants in the control group did not receive this training. All participants, who were intermediate and advanced Spanish students completed a pre- and post-test where they listened to a series of recorded sentences spoken by two males and two females, all native Andalusian Spanish speakers. The participants were instructed to fill in the blank of the missing words to test for intelligibility and to transcribe the entire sentence to test for comprehensibility. Both the control and experimental groups improved on the perception of /s/-weakening. Students entered the study abroad program with some knowledge of /s/-weakening as students in the control group transcribed 15% of the words correctly and students in the experimental group transcribed 14% correctly on the pre-test. After instruction occurred, transcription accuracy for the control group increased by 10% and for the experimental group by 27%. The authors note, however, that the control group increased their ability to transcribe function words, such as definite articles, and not necessarily content words. This study demonstrated that explicit instruction during study abroad was not necessary for students to increase their perception of /s/-weakening. Nevertheless, explicit instruction while abroad resulted in a higher increase in comprehensibility than study abroad without explicit instruction. It should be noted that the intermediate and advanced students in this study were never able to transcribe the words with great accuracy, reaching a peak accuracy of 41%.

A third study conducted by Trimble (2011) investigated L2 perception of various Spanish dialects, including some that typically exhibited /s/-weakening, by L2 students at the intermediate and advanced level. The university students listened to phrases spoken by 24 Spanish speakers. The Spanish speakers included two males and two females, who were near-native speakers of Spanish but did not identify with any particular dialect. Two males and two females spoke each of the following varieties of Spanish: Caribbean, Castilian, Rioplatense (i.e., Buenos Aires, Argentina), Colombian, and Mexican. The L2 learners were asked to transcribe what they thought they heard and to rank what they heard on a scale corresponding to how easy or hard it was to understand each speech sample. The results revealed that Colombian, Mexican, and near-native Spanish speaker dialects were significantly more intelligible than Caribbean, Castilian, and Rioplatense dialects. Caribbean and Rioplatense Spanish are both known as /s/-weakening varieties of Spanish, while Colombian and Mexican Spanish are not. Higher proficiency level meant higher intelligibility, with the advanced students exhibiting higher intelligibility scores than the intermediate students for all dialects. Among the advanced students, those with more Spanish contact outside the classroom performed significantly better, with respect to intelligibility scores, than students with less contact.

Schmidt (2011) carried out the first large-scale study of /s/-weakening, conducting his research with 215 university students in five different levels of Spanish. The levels of Spanish corresponded to the courses in which the students were enrolled at the university, having been placed according to results on a proficiency test administered by the university. For the study, students responded to recorded spoken prompts of native speakers from Colombia (a non /s/-weakening variety) and Argentina (an /s/-weakening variety), and selected the word they thought they heard, with the options including 'f', 'l', 'r', 'n', 'nothing', or 's'. The results demon-

strated that beginning students generally had a difficult time identifying the /s/ as 's'. There were more incidences of identifying the /s/ as 's' by high intermediate students. More advanced students perceived /s/ as 's' significantly more than beginning and intermediate students. The most advanced students, near native-speaking graduate students, were on par with native speakers who also completed the experiment. The native speakers came from non /s/-weakening dialects of Spanish. In addition, results from students who had completed study abroad experiences in /s/-weakening regions suggested a correlation between that exposure and their ability to correctly perceive /s/-weakening. Schmidt's study, unlike the current study, limited students to a forced-choice response of one of six choices of sounds they identified as /s/-weakening. The current study allows students to transcribe the word they thought they heard, much like the study design of Trimble (2011). In this way, the participants are not faced with a choice, but rather generate an original response by writing the word they thought they heard, without any prompting.

In each of the studies reviewed here, results indicate that students perceive /s/-weakening to varying degrees. Furthermore, incidences of increased perceptive abilities seem to be marked by proficiency level, defined largely by the program of study, and study abroad or contact in the TL outside of class. The current study adds to the growing research on the acquisition of sociolinguistic features by foreign language students by addressing the following research questions:

1.  Do adult native English speakers learning Spanish perceive /s/-weakening?

    1a. If /s/-weakening is perceived, are there differences across proficiency levels?

2.  How do students' perception of /s/-weakening compare to native speakers' perception of /s/-weakening?

3.  How do adult native English speakers learning Spanish perceive /s/-weakening?

**Methods**

*Subjects*

The participants, all adult native English speakers learning Spanish at a large midwestern university in the U.S., ranged in age from 18 to 40. Nineteen students were enrolled in second semester beginning Spanish, 21 in fourth semester intermediate Spanish, and 27 in low-advanced Spanish (i.e., sixth semester Spanish or beyond). The students in beginning Spanish were true beginners who completed the first semester beginning Spanish course prior to enrolling in the second semester beginner course. The intermediate students had either taken three semesters of Spanish prior to enrolling in the course, or had tested into this level via a proficiency test conducted by the language-testing program at the university. The advanced students completed a speaking, writing, listening, and reading comprehension test to determine if they had the proficiency level needed to enroll in fifth semester Spanish. Two native Spanish speakers, both from non /s/-weakening regions, also performed both tasks.

*Tasks*

A native university-educated Venezuelan female speaker read a list of words, some of which she was instructed to pronounce with a full /s/ and others with a weakened /s/ as she would in her native dialect. [1] The words chosen were all real Spanish words versus invented words sometimes used in studies. The speaker pronounced one word at a time, pausing slightly between words. The words were recorded with a Marantz digital recorder in random order. Each participant listened to the recording of the speaker pronouncing each word and then on their answer sheet for Task 1 (see Appendix A) circled one of two words (e.g., '*costa*' or '*cota*'), based on what they thought they heard. The participants also heard distracter words, which were all minimal pairs, or words that differ by one sound only (e.g., '*pelo*', '*palo*'), and were instructed to circle which word they thought they heard. For the second task, completed directly after the first task, the participants wrote on their answer sheet the one or two words they heard for Task 2 (see Appendix B). Upon completion of both tasks, which took about four and a half minutes, students filled out a background questionnaire (see Appendix C), which included questions about their prior personal and academic experiences with the Spanish language.

**Data Analysis**

In Task 1, the participants listened to 80 words. If a participant perceived /s/-weakening as having an /s/, as opposed to nothing, the only other option, then it was counted as correct. Task 1 included eleven tokens, or samples, of /s/-weakening. Only subjects who responded to all 80 words were included in the analysis, leaving a total 71 subjects for Task 1: 19 in beginner Spanish, 21 in intermediate Spanish, 27 in advanced Spanish, and two native speakers.

For the second task the subjects listened to 12 units, each consisting of a noun or a noun with its article. Within these 12 units there were nine samples, or tokens of /s/-weakening. A token was counted as correct if a participant wrote something in the space where the /s/ should have been. For example one of the advanced Spanish students wrote "*tofcco*" and another wrote "*tozco*" when the correct answer was "*tosco*". A few subjects left several items blank, so their data were excluded, leaving a total of 56 subjects for Task 2: 16 in beginning Spanish, 13 in intermediate Spanish, 25 in advanced Spanish, and two native speakers.

The percentage of correct perceptions of each type of /s/-weakening was calculated for each task along with the total number of occurrences of /s/-weakening. A series of one-way ANOVA tests were calculated in order to compare differences across proficiency levels in each task.

**Results**

Table 1 displays the mean and standard deviation of /s/-weakening perception of each group. The one-way ANOVA conducted to test the differences across the groups resulted in significant differences for the native speakers and the students, $f_{(3, 40)} = 7.46$, $p < .001$. The least significant difference (LSD) post hoc test reveals significant differences between the native speakers and beginning $p < .001$, intermediate, $p < .001$, and advanced proficiency levels, $p < .001$. Although there was a dif-

ference of 7% between the beginning and intermediate students, this difference was not significant. This demonstrates that although the students are heading in the direction of the native speakers, they have a long way to go before their performances approximate target-like norms.

**Table 1**

*Results from Task 1.*

| Proficiency Level | M (%) | SD (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Beginning | 31.10 | 29.63 |
| Intermediate | 38.02 | 39.38 |
| Advanced | 38.11 | 34.81 |
| Native Speakers | 49.54 | 40.62 |

The results of Task 2 are displayed in Table 2. There is an increase in /s/-weakening perception as proficiency level increases. The one-way ANOVA resulted in significant differences, $f(3, 32) = 5.38$, $p < .01$. The Games-Howell post hoc test demonstrated a significant difference between the native speakers and the beginning students, $p < .05$. The difference between the native speakers and the intermediate level students was approaching significance, $p < .1$. This difference was not significant for advanced students.

**Table 2**

*Results from Task 2.*

| Proficiency Level | M (%) | SD (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Beginning | 7.05 | 17.56 |
| Intermediate | 16.53 | 29.21 |
| Advanced | 22.70 | 31.71 |
| Native Speakers | 66.67 | 50.00 |

**Discussion**

In response to the first research questions: *Do adult native English speakers learning Spanish perceive /s/-weakening?* and *If /s/-weakening is perceived, are there differences across proficiency levels?*, students of Spanish do perceive /s/-weakening, but the extent of this perception varies based on the level of the Spanish course. In the first task, the students in advanced and intermediate Spanish courses both perceived /s/-weakening 38% of the time, only slightly more than students in beginning Spanish courses at 31%. In the second task the level of perception increased as the level of the Spanish course increased. The students in the current study demonstrated greater capacity to perceive the /s/-weakening feature than those in the study of Rasmussen and Zampini (2010), where students primarily perceived the feature in function words (i.e., definite and indefinite articles) as opposed to content words, the latter constituting the primary focus of the current study.

In response to the second research question: *How do* students' *perception of /s/-weakening compare to native speakers' perception of /s/-weakening?*, native speakers outperformed all of the students, perceiving /s/-weakening 50% of the time in the first task. This percentage is not large, which demonstrates the difficulties that even native speakers of non /s/-weakening dialect have when perceiving this feature with little to no context clues. With respect to the second task, native speakers outperformed the best students by 44%. It is suggested that if students are able to perceive /s/-weakening, it may be easier for them to understand the varieties of Spanish they will potentially encounter as Spanish language users, many of which could include /s/-weakening. These regional differences are important, as much of the input such as listening comprehension activities provided to foreign language learners comes from a variety of sources that include a variety of dialects. As a rule, dialects comprise different sounds, and to the extent that learners adapt to varied dialects, the better their comprehension of the TL.

In response to the third research question: *How do adult native English speakers learning Spanish perceive /s/-weakening?*, the majority of the time, students perceived /s/-weakening in Task 1 as deletion of the /s/. This mis-perception can potentially create misunderstanding, for example perceiving '*pasta*', or pasta, as '*pata*', or duck. That is, in a situation lacking additional context, students would understand the word *pata* when spoken by a speaker from an /s/-weakening dialect instead of the word *pasta*. Regarding Task 2, students perceived /s/-weakening as /s/, nothing, and the following: one intermediate learner wrote '*narij*' instead of '*nariz*', one advanced learner wrote '*tofcco*' instead of '*tosco*', one advanced learner wrote '*una escuchara*' and one wrote '*una escuchada*' instead of '*unas cucharas*'. It is interesting to note that only the intermediate and advanced students perceived /s/-weakening as something other than /s/ or deletion. The 'f', but not the 'j' was found in previous studies (Schmidt, 2011). However, 'j' was not one of the options provided in Schmidt (2011) where students could choose among 'f', 'l', 'r', 'n', 'nothing', or 's' after listening to a nonce, or made up word, containing /s/-weakening.

The intermediate students in the current study exhibited similar percentages of /s/-weakening in Task 2 as Rasmussen and Zampini's (2010) intermediate and advanced learners at the beginning of their time abroad. The advanced students in the current study exhibited slightly higher percentages, but these differences were not significant. Because instruction while abroad resulted in a 27% increase in perception of /s/-weakening as opposed to only a 10% increase by those who traveled overseas with the study abroad program, but received no formal instruction while there (Rasmussen & Zampini, 2010), instruction in the classroom in a non-study abroad environment may also result in such improvement. Although this is a plausibly appealing speculation, it is unknown at what level this instruction should occur, in the absence of research specifically investigating that claim.

There is some indication in the second task that Spanish students advance their perception of the /s/-weakening feature as they progress through the levels of Spanish. This improvement based on proficiency level was also evidenced in the research of Trimble (2011) and Schmidt (2011). It may be suggested that perception of /s/-weakening develops exponentially, rather than in a linear manner, such that significant increases in perception take longer as learners progress upward in their general

language competency. To fully prove this, including an additional group of graduate student learners of Spanish as study participants may have resulted in significant difference between intermediate and advanced students, as was true in Geeslin and Gudmestad (2008), where only five advanced students (out of 130 students of varying proficiency levels) is producing /s/-weakening.

**Limitations and Future Studies**

There are several limitations to this study. The number of subjects in the study, a total of 67 across three different levels of Spanish courses, was small. The inclusion of more levels of Spanish courses and more participants in each level could strengthen the validity of the current study and provide additional insight into the findings. In addition, the order of the tasks might have affected the results. Students may have been aware of what they were being tested on when they started Task 2, simply based on completing Task 1. Also, a future study could include a measure to determine the familiarity of the words used in each task. Familiarity with the words could result in better perception of /s/-weakening. A final limitation is that proficiency was determined based on the course the students were taking, which was determined by previous coursework and proficiency tests used by the university. A future study could include a more objective measure of proficiency to ensure that students are indeed at differing levels of proficiency.

Future studies could investigate if students produce /s/-weakening in their own speech. Currently, there are no studies that investigate both the perception and the production of /s/-weakening by Spanish students. Finally, future research could expand on Rasmussen and Zampini's (2010) study on the effects of instruction while abroad and include instruction on /s/-weakening for Spanish students at various levels to determine its effects in the classroom environment in the US. Future studies could also explore the effect of study abroad on the perception of /s/-weakening. For example, are students that study abroad in /s/-weakening Spanish regions better at perceiving /s/-weakening than their peers at similar proficiency levels who have never studied abroad or studied in non /s/-weakening regions?

**Implications for Teaching**

Despite the fact that Arteaga (2000) argues for the teaching of major regional phonological features starting in the beginning Spanish language classroom, Gutierrez and Fairclough (2006) state that it is not common practice for language instructors to teach students about the various regional features, as standard varieties are typically favored over other varieties. Accordingly, the most standard variety of Spanish is the one put forth by the *Real Academia Española*, which does not include any regional features spoken outside of Madrid, Spain. Similarly, the most standard variety of French is the one put forth by the *Académie Française* in Paris, France. Gutierrez and Fairclough (2006) go on to argue that "sociolinguistic variation should be incorporated in the classroom" such that students are at the very least exposed to the features of the major target language regions (p. 186).

This study has implications for the teaching and learning of sociolinguistic features. For L2 instructors of students who likely will not participate in a study abroad

program, it is important to expose language students to the major regional differences of the TL. Such exposure, from the beginning of language learning, could allow students more ease of understanding the many different varieties of the TL they may encounter in their academic study of Spanish or future life experiences. As Rasmussen and Zampini (2010) have revealed, students perceive a sociolinguistic feature only up to 15% of the time prior to receiving explicit instruction on the feature and often rely on context clues to perceive this feature. This means that the students are not fully able to comprehend the feature and have very little comprehension when there are no contextual clues available to them, as was the case in the current study.

For L2 instructors of students who might travel abroad in the future, the chances of learners encountering a native speaker who exhibits a major regional feature of the TL is quite high. For example, due to increasing globalization and human boundary-crossing world wide, it is quite possible that learners studying in a region where they may not hear /s/-weakening by locals may hear it produced by an immigrant. The current study confirms that even at advanced levels, students are not able to perceive this major feature as well as native Spanish-speakers from areas where the feature is not employed. It is essential that students perceive this feature due to the likelihood they will encounter native speakers who employ the feature on a regular basis. One potential mechanism for assisting students is by exposing them to this feature and other common regional features through explicit instruction.

Because language learners are exposed to a variety of TL speakers, some of whom use unique regional features in their speech, early and ongoing exposure to these features in the foreign language classroom could strengthen comprehension of the TL. The majority of the learners in the current study reported no prior knowledge of the regional feature under examination. If students were aware of these regional features from the beginning of formal language study, they would be better equipped to perceive the features and determine many factors about speakers, such as what the region of origin is, if one uses formal or informal speech, and socioeconomic status.

The need for language educators to address regional features in their teaching stems from the fact that it could lead to more effective communication and in turn greater sociolinguistic competence. The current study revealed that beginning Spanish students generally lack the ability to perceive the feature. It is recommended that some type of intervention be implemented in the L2 classroom. At the very least, in line with Arteaga (2000), L2 teachers should expose students to the major sociolinguistic features of the TL. This could result in increased listening comprehension when faced with speakers from different regions where the TL is spoken.

## Conclusion

This experiment demonstrated that, while L2 Spanish university students are much weaker than native Spanish speakers at perceiving /s/-weakening, there are differences across levels of Spanish. In both tasks the advanced students performed better than the beginning students, mirroring the findings of Schmidt (2011) and Trimble (2011). In general L2 learners do not perceive /s/-weakening as the /s/ being present in the word. They tend to perceive it as deletion, but not in the same way as native Spanish speakers.

This research contributes to the field of variable features of Spanish as perceived by L2 Spanish learners. It demonstrates that intermediate and advanced students more readily perceive /s/-weakening than beginning students, regardless of whether they have formal instruction on the feature. Nevertheless, learners have not yet reached native-like norms. It is especially important for learners to perceive common sociolinguistic features if they are to gain competence in the TL and correctly interpret spoken language. Pedagogical intervention could support learners in attaining native-like comprehension of sociolinguistic features, but additional research is needed to make conclusions about such interventions.

The need for understanding sociolinguistic features is two-fold. First, increased understanding dispels negative conceptualizations of the TL. Language can vary for a variety of reasons. One reason deals with the social stigma attached to certain features. Learners that can perceive sociolinguistic features will in turn be able to perceive more about the speaker, such as their socioeconomic level. Language also varies due to geographic location. This intersects with social stigma, because a feature that is stigmatized in one geographic location may not be stigmitized in another. An additional reason is due to different registers, or (e.g., formal vs. informal speech). Increased understanding based on real information and knowledge has the power to break down negative preconceptions. Finally, learners who are able to perceive sociolinguistic features are potentially better at comprehending the variety of the TL that is characterized by those features. In a world where learners have access to a broad spectrum of TL speakers, via the Internet and other sources, they are likely to be exposed to a diversity of TL varieties. Knowing which major sociolinguistic features are associated with each language variety can facilitate more in-depth comprehension of the TL in addition to informing learners about the speaker in terms of style, register, and origin. Learners that eventually want to incorporate sociolinguistic features in their speech will benefit from knowing why the features vary. To the extent that language learners are exposed to language varieties, the greater their cultural understanding and sensitivity as well as their effectiveness in communication

## Notes

1. According to Lipski (1994) word final and syllable final /s/ is almost always weakened or deleted in Venezuelan Spanish. Sanchez (2004) claims that aspiration is the norm in countries like Venezuela, which exhibits similar /s/-aspiration patterns as Caribbean countries.

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## Appendix A

Student Blank Answer Sheet

**Task 1:** Circle the word you think you hear. Respond as quickly as possible after hearing each word.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. torro | toro | 41. caña | daña |
| 2. dado | dedo | 42. gama | cama |
| 3. costa | cota | 43. diente | dientes |
| 4. lee | lea | 44. termine | terminé |
| 5. cabeza | cabezas | 45. gato | gasto |
| 6. tos | dos | 46. tejar | dejar |
| 7. poseo | posee | 47. cuchillos | cuchillo |
| 8. siéntete | siéntate | 48. pedo | pero |
| 9. la bata | la pata | 49. sueño | sueños |
| 10. tosco | toco | 50. casa | gasa |
| 11. pero | paro | 51. vuelto | vuelta |
| 12. joda | jora | 52. pedo | pero |
| 13. sentido | sentado | 53. gasto | casto |
| 14. año | ano | 54. baso | paso |
| 15. pata | pasta | 55. gana | cana |
| 16. ojos | ojo | 56. come | comer |
| 17. estético | esférico | 57. una cura | unas curas |
| 18. unas cervezas | una cerveza | 58. todo | foro |
| 19. práctica | practica | 59. mala | malo |
| 20. toro | todo | 60. pelo | palo |
| 21. isla | hila | 61. bañar | dañar |
| 22. los socios | los ocios | 62. puma | poma |
| 23. puente | fuente | 63. algunas mujeres | alguna mujer |
| 24. las suecas | la sueca | 64. hueso | hueco |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25. tus fuentes | tu fuente | 65. tan | dan |
| 26. mi bisabuelo | mis bisabuelos | 66. sube | supe |
| 27. una rambla | unas ramblas | 67. vaca | vasca |
| 28. mis papeles | mi papel | 68. unas cubanas | una cubana |
| 29. busque | busquen | 69. todo | foro |
| 30. algunas vacas | alguna vaca | 70. mis lentes | mi lente |
| 31. pecar | becar | 71. piro | pido |
| 32. su nariz | sus narices | 72. time | dime |
| 33. joda | jora | 73. gatos | datos |
| 34. plasta | plata | 74. las reuniones | la reunión |
| 35. gato | gasto | 75. pizco | bizco |
| 36. aceptó | acepto | 76. pido | piro |
| 37. las naranjas | la naranja | 77. toro | todo |
| 38. basar | pasar | 78. capital | capitel |
| 39. las nativas | la nativa | 79. costa | cota |
| 40. poder | podar | 80. tierras | tierra |

## Appendix B

**Task 2:** Write the word(s) you think hear. Respond as quickly as possible after hearing each word(s).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. |
| 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. |
| 9. | 10. | 11. | 12. |

**Appendix C**

Background Questionnaire

1. Circle one:         Male        Female

2. How old are you? _____

3. Is your native language English: Yes    No

    If you circled no, what is your native language(s)? _____

    What city and state(s) did you grow up in? _____

4. How long have you studied Spanish?

    Elementary School _____

    Middle School _____

    High School _____

    University _____

5. Which Spanish speaking countries have you traveled to? What was the purpose of going to each country? How long did you spend in each country?

| Country | Purpose (i.e. vacation, study abroad) | Time |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |

6. Have you studied any other languages besides Spanish?    Yes    No

    If yes, which languages? _____

    How long did you study each language? _____

7. Have you ever studied linguistics?

    If yes, what do you know about s-aspiration?

# 6

# Mutually Beneficial Service Learning: Language Teacher Candidates in a Local Community Center

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*Abstract*

*This article reports on a project designed to provide mutually beneficial solutions to challenges faced by world language teacher candidates, their preparation program, and a local community center. The project provided opportunities for teacher candidates enrolled in a world language (WL) teacher education course to complete clinical experiences through a service learning experience at the center. Teaching Spanish to children from low-income families provided candidates valuable classroom experiences with younger learners. This article explores benefits and challenges of WL teacher candidates teaching Spanish in a local community center.*

## Background

A number of challenges face world language (WL) teacher candidates as they prepare to student teach and graduate. They may do little teaching, too often relegated to observe from the back of the room during pre-student teaching practicum experiences. Additionally, they often struggle to meet the Advanced-Low proficiency on an Oral Proficiency Interview required by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)/National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) *Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* (2002). Furthermore, language teacher preparation programs can find it challenging to expose their teacher candidates to high quality elementary and secondary school settings prior to student teaching. Corresponding to the challenges outlined here and presented as a response to these challenges, local community centers struggle at times to provide high quality programs for youth and find volunteers who are able to communicate with parents who may not speak English.

The project described in this article sought to provide mutually beneficial solutions to the aforementioned concerns through a service-learning project. This research was conducted in the context of a WL teacher education course, in which teacher candidates were enrolled and during which they taught Spanish to K-4th graders at a community center, prior to their 10-week student teaching experience. In this article the author describes a pilot study that explores the benefits and challenges related to WL teacher candidates teaching Spanish in a local community center.

**Literature Review**

There exists a vast literature documenting the benefits and challenges of service learning related to language acquisition, particularly among Spanish students at the postsecondary level (Abbott & Lear, 2010; Caldwell, 2007; Hellebrandt, 2006; Lear & Abbott, 2009; Marks, 2008; Sanders, 2005; Zapata, 2011). Less robust is the literature related to WL teacher preparation and service learning. With the exception of Gascoigne Lally (2001) and Tilley-Lubbs (2004), few have explored the potentially fruitful connections between WL teacher preparation programs and the larger community.

Various definitions of service learning exist, but this author will use Jacoby's (1996) definition of service learning as a "form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (p. 5). When done well, service-learning projects can create "mutually beneficial relationships" among universities, students, and community partners (Lear & Abbott, 2009, p. 313). While service learning connects the subject matter under study, the student, and the outside world (Lisman, 1998), it "is not and cannot be simple charity" (Gascoigne Lally, 2001, p. 54). Rather, there must be a benefit to the student through additional engagement with the subject matter.

The *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st century*'s (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) Communities standard encourages language instructors to construct learning events in which students "use the language both within and beyond the school setting" and "show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment" (p. 64). Polansky (2004) emphasized the Communities aspect of service learning through her description of a course called *Tutoring for Community Outreach*, in which undergraduates studying WLs tutored K-12 students in local schools. Positive impact on the part of both populations was documented, with undergraduates reaping the "rewards of helping others, the advantages of working off campus, [and] the joy of interacting with energetic, smiling children," among others (Polansky, 2004, p. 371-372). Students at the local schools enjoyed the extra attention afforded by undergraduates in the classroom, along with the personal relationships they established with older role models.

Many other advantages can present themselves to university students and those they serve. For those in the community, there is the obvious service provided and the benefits those services bring about (Gascoigne Lally, 2001). To universities, service learning may bridge the "town/gown gap" (Lisman, 1999, p. 41) by having students provide assistance to the community that would otherwise not be provided. Additionally, university students can develop their human empathy and increase tolerance of others (Guarassi & Mapstone, 1998). Engagement with the community can also help develop skills central to working with others (Gascoigne Lally, 2001), along with providing connections for an otherwise disconnected group (Claus & Ogden, 1999).

Challenges also exist when carrying out service learning projects. For example, mandatory service learning may be considered a drain on resources or against the constitutional rights of students required to participate in the service-learning proj-

ect (Yates & Youniss, 1999). Care must be taken too to avoid parachuting into a setting and attempting to treat societal symptoms, without working to solve the larger social problems themselves (Lisman, 1999). Furthermore, "using the community as a laboratory" (Lisman, 1998, p. 30) can work against the objectives of the service learning project, exposing community members to subpar versions of critical services. Additionally, measuring service learning program outcomes is difficult, with cause-effect relationships rarely found (Schine, 1999).

Service learning can, however, provide a powerful and practical means for WL teacher preparation programs to prepare teacher candidates to teach in K-12 settings. Practical teaching experiences can be the focus of any service-learning project for teacher candidates. In order to be called *service learning*, as opposed to *service*, the student experience must relate directly to course objectives (Jacoby, 1996). That is, language teacher candidates must carry out activities that benefit themselves as well as the community partners, specifically enhancing their professional development.

Among other benefits, a service-learning project can help teacher candidates get to know students like those they will teach during their career. Among their suggestions for the future, Bott-VanHouten, Hoyt-Oukada, and Scow (2003) recommend that "an orientation to service learning should be considered for inclusion in foreign language teacher preparation programs, as working in the community with diverse groups supports the national student standards goal of 'communities' and builds cultural competence" (p. 6). Tilley-Lubbs (2004) highlighted service-learning projects as a "means of giving pre-service teachers a firsthand understanding of the community and its culture" (p. 132). That focus on the local community helps teacher candidates develop a deeper connection to an environment that they might otherwise not experience during their undergraduate studies.

Teacher candidates can acquire real-time teaching experiences that assist in their professional development. Gascoigne Lally (2001) pointed out that in service-learning experiences teacher candidates can try out and refine their own teaching with real children, as an advantageous supplement to the laboratory-style microteaching activities with their peers. Service-learning opportunities can also help teacher candidates transition more easily from the role of student to that of teacher (Gascoigne Lally, 2001), a process that can be challenging for language teacher candidates (Vélez-Renden, 2006), as they initially focus on themselves and their own performance instead of on student learning.

Language proficiency development among WL teacher candidates can also be challenging, particularly in ACTFL/NCATE accredited programs that required Advanced-Low oral proficiency (ACTFL/NCATE, 2002). Fraga-Cañadas (2010) explains that too often WL teacher preparation programs do little to help teacher candidates develop and maintain the necessary oral proficiency in the target language to meet that goal. Service learning can assist WL teacher candidates in making authentic connections where they use the target language in purposeful ways with community members, particularly parents with whom they need practice communicating in meaningful ways.

Pedagogical, humanistic, and linguistic benefits are possible for WL teacher candidates as they carry out a service-learning project. Challenges still arise, however. This research, financially supported by Illinois State University's Scholarship

of Teaching and Learning civic engagement/service learning grant, explored both the benefits and the challenges of a service-learning project to provide K-4th graders Spanish instruction at a local community center. The research questions that guide this study are:

1. What benefits, if any, do WL teacher candidates gain from teaching Spanish to K-4th grade children at a local community center as a service-learning project?

2. What challenges, if any, present themselves to WL teacher candidates during that experience?

## Methods

### Settings

The first of two settings in which this study takes place is Illinois State University, located in Normal, IL. Approximately 20,000 students attend Illinois State University, among whom approximately 5,000 are teacher candidates (Illinois State University, 2013). The WL teacher preparation program is housed within the College of Arts and Science's Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures with approximately 45% of graduates majoring in teacher education. At the time of this study, there were 130 teacher candidates in the program, ranging from freshmen to student teachers, with 22 French, nine German, and 99 Spanish teacher candidates. There are approximately 20 student teachers from the department every year. The students in the department have a long history of service learning, including Spanish club service learning trips to Costa Rica and Honduras, along with acting as spontaneous interpreters for parent-teacher conferences in the Chicago Public Schools.

The French, German, and Spanish teacher education sequence includes several general pedagogy courses in the College of Education, as well as six WL-specific methods credits. Those six credits are divided between a four-credit course entitled *Principles of Foreign Language Learning* and the two-credit *Foreign Language Teaching in the K-12 Setting*. The first course, which is more theoretical in nature, takes place during the entire fall semester with an Intermediate-High oral proficiency prerequisite and 35 clinical hours as part of the course. The more practical second course requires 12 clinical hours and takes place the first five weeks of the spring semester, after which many teacher candidates carry out 10 weeks of student teaching, which requires Advanced-Low oral proficiency. Most clinical hours and student teaching experiences take place in middle and/or high school settings. Approximately 22 to 26 teacher candidates enroll in each of these two courses each year, but several teacher candidates who take the methods classes are not able to proceed to student teaching because they cannot demonstrate Advanced-Low oral proficiency. Most of those who are not able to complete the teacher education sequence choose to graduate with a Spanish major instead of the major in Spanish Teacher Education. The K-12 WL teacher education program is currently in the midst of implementing curricular changes, with a movement toward integrating theory and practice during coursework and helping teacher candidates achieve Advanced-Low proficiency.

The WL teacher candidates at Illinois State University have several needs that this project attempted to address. First of all, in order to advance to student teaching,

an Advanced-Low oral proficiency is required of candidates. Additionally, a number of clinical hours must be completed before student teaching, with half of those hours completed in diverse settings. Further, candidates need a means to connect language acquisition theory to language teaching practice, along with practice communicating with families. Finally, in Illinois, WL teachers obtain a professional educator license endorsed in their language for grades K-12, but there is a paucity of local K-6 programs in the area. Therefore, WL teacher candidates typically lack experiences teaching K-6 learners.

Less than two miles from the Illinois State University campus is the UNITY Community Center (UCC), which is a community organization that serves local families with limited resources, some of whom do not speak English as a first language, and is supervised by monolingual program directors. UCC is a multicultural Out of School Time center that provides programming for youth and offers a positive, structured learning environment for those between five and 18 years of age (UCC, 2013). The community center serves 45 students, a growing number of whom are from French- or Spanish-speaking immigrant families. While many Illinois State University teacher candidates volunteer at this community center, there are few who are fluent in a language other than English. Speaking to non-English-speaking monolingual parents and children new to the United States can be difficult for program directors because they too are monolingual, with English as their only language. UCC's needs include volunteers, interpreters of Spanish and French, and role models for K-12 students, along with many other resources that fall outside the parameters of this project.

UCC also needs quality programming for their students who are at the center up to four hours each of five afternoons per week. None of the schools in which students are enrolled has world languages as part of their curriculum. This project was designed to give UCC students a language learning experience they might not otherwise have. Although not an ideal setting or schedule for develop learners' second language proficiency, this project attempts to introduce young learners to a new facet of their home language or a new language altogether.

In the spring of 2011, the UCC directors and the researcher initiated a conversation that led to collaboration on the present project. Collaboration among all parties, with respective needs clearly articulated, as an imperative component in effective service-learning projects, is corroborated in the literature (Gascoigne Lally, 2001; Hellebrandt & Wurr, 2007). During that initial conversation, UCC directors and the researcher discussed ways of addressing each party's challenges. The researcher realized the potential for Illinois State University teacher candidates to fill existing linguistic gaps, provide mentorship to K-12 students, and engage in an authentic teaching experience at UCC. The UCC directors recognized the potential for UCC families served to be better able to communicate with UCC staff, to learn more rapidly about the American educational system, and to continue the children's literacy development in the family's first language while learning English.

*Intervention*

Based on initial conversations with UCC directors, the researcher first encouraged WL teacher candidates in the fall of 2011 to participate in regular programming

at UCC. Such activities included one-on-one tutoring, 4-H, dance and gardening activities among others. Teacher candidates completed clinical hour course requirements, although no direct supervision from the methods instructor was provided. Later, in the spring of 2012, this pilot service-learning program to teach K-4th graders basic Spanish was implemented once a week for seven weeks, with methods-instructor supervision. Again, in the fall of 2012 WL teacher candidates were encouraged to complete clinical hours at UCC, and in the spring of 2013, seven weeks of Spanish instruction were offered to K-4th grade students with instructor supervision.

The decision to teach Spanish to the children at the UCC was based on a number of factors. First, approximately 85% of the teacher candidates taking the methods class are Spanish teacher education majors. As this was a pilot project, the researcher thought it best to begin modestly and add French and German to the UCC program later. Some UCC students were from Spanish-speaking homes, in which case teacher candidates had to provide differentiated activities for native speakers, a teaching opportunity not often encountered until student teaching.

During the first week of Spanish instruction, the methods instructor, the researcher of this study, modeled teaching that included nearly exclusive use of the target language and laid the foundation for the following six weeks of instruction. This modeling was deemed necessary because many of the teacher candidates did not have previous experience teaching such young learners, although they were familiar with language acquisition, general pedagogy, and child development. Most of teacher candidates' prior clinical hours were completed in local middle or high school classrooms.

For each of the following six weeks, three different Spanish teacher candidates co-taught 50 minutes of beginning Spanish lessons each week, based on a co-designed curriculum developed by the methods instructor and the teacher candidates during the fall of 2011. Having the opportunity to implement curriculum plans – designed during a previous methods course – in an authentic teaching context, represents a pedagogical endeavor that the teacher candidates typically did not encounter in their teacher education sequence. Spanish classes were given in an open area of the community center with six round tables that fit six to eight young students each. Young learners were seated at the tables with one teacher candidate who helped them carry out the activities while the three other teacher candidates co-taught. Any remaining teacher candidates sat on the floor around the perimeter of the teaching area. The only exception was the first week of the first year when the young learners seemed uncomfortable with so many adults standing around the back of their class.

Prior to participating in UCC activities and as preparation for the service learning experience, teacher candidates completed a mandatory 60-minute training session carried out by UCC directors during regular class time of the methods course, as well as a required three and a half hour poverty simulation workshop entitled *Living in the State of Poverty* outside of class time. That simulation was made available by the University of Illinois Extension-McLean County and addressed the challenges of the working poor and those in severe poverty (University of Illinois Board of Trustees, 2011). If teacher candidate schedules could not accommodate the simulation outside of class, they were permitted to engage in another online poverty simulation.

To defer program start-up costs, the researcher applied for and was awarded

an Illinois State University Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Civic Engagement/ Service Learning Small Grant, which was used to purchase a collection of age-appropriate, grade-level books on K-12 curricular topics in Spanish, French, and German for the UCC library. Book topics included science, fiction, music, and others themes connected to local schools' curricula for grades K-4. Also purchased were other miscellaneous items used during UCC teaching sessions, such as large post it notes, markers, and name tags.

*Participants*

Eight of 18 (44%) WL teacher candidates agreed to participate during the 2011-2012 academic year and seven of 24 (29%) participated during the 2012-2013 academic year. Of those 15 participants, three were male and 12 were female. All participants were Spanish teacher candidates and achieved at least an Intermediate-High level of oral proficiency in the target language by the beginning of the WL methods sequence. All participants were between 21 and 26 years of age.

*Data Sources and Analysis*

Following Institution Review Board approval in September 2011, data were collected from established assignments for the two required WL methods courses and included three drafts of a philosophy of teaching statements, seven brief reflective essays posted to the course wiki, and one written reflection on the 50-minute teaching experience at UCC. Additional data included the instructor's classroom observation notes and field notes related to teacher candidates' UCC lessons, as well as written and oral communication with UCC directors.

Qualitative analyses were deemed to be the most appropriate means of answering the research questions posed. Quantitative measurement was not used given the small number of participants, the nature of research questions, and the exploratory nature of the study. Both the researcher and a graduate assistant analyzed the data using recursive analysis to detect repeating patterns (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Given their shared areas of interest and research specialties, a high inter-rater reliability between investigators was established.

**Results**

With respect to the first research question about the benefits, if any, WL teacher candidates gained from teaching Spanish to K-4th graders at a local community center, analysis of various candidate assignments collected as data sources revealed a number of benefits to teacher candidates. Stated benefits included an increased connection to the wider community, enhanced empathy and compassion, and additional practical experiences with classroom management and young language learners.

First, 80% (*n* = 12) participants mentioned in at least one of their written assignments the importance of connecting to the community outside of their own comfort zone. Many participants referenced their own past educational experiences and how they differed culturally and socioeconomically from those of the UCC students. One female participant addressed the topic of communities in a reflection of teaching wiki entry:

When I was in high school and learning Spanish, I had absolutely no

> experience with the Spanish-speaking community in my area. I live
> in a 90% Caucasian community and our largest minority is Arabic
> speakers, and I was a bit sheltered, and I do not want the same thing
> for my children or my students. There is a world out there, and we
> need to explore it (Participant 3).

Sixty-six percent (n = 10) of the participants also addressed the goals of the Communities standard and their desired fulfillment of that standard in their own instruction.

A second benefit to WL teacher candidates was enhanced empathy and compassion, with all 15 participants mentioning that topic in at least one assignment. One male participant in the final draft of his philosophy of teaching statement stated the following:

> I want to instill a more humanistic view of the world in my students
> through the use of culture and communication. I would like to inspire
> them to advocate for the needs and concerns of the people whose cultures and languages my students are learning about (Participant 15).

A similar realization that teaching is a human endeavor was at the center of five participants' philosophy of teaching statements.

Practical experiences with young learners were mentioned by 87% of participants (*n* = 13) in their reflection wiki entries. Seventy-seven percent of the participants who highlighted these practical experiences shared (*n* = 10) that they had no previous experience with K-6 WL learners. Sixty percent (*n* = 9) mentioned that they had no experiences with any younger learners in a classroom setting. All 15 participants expressed surprise at the level of energy exhibited by the younger learners and the classroom management challenges that resulted.

Gaining classroom management experience was another benefit pointed out by participants, with 67% (*n* = 10) mentioning it in at least one assignment. Eight of those ten mentioned that the service-learning experience allowed them to try out the classroom management strategies that they were learning in their methods course. Two of those 10 mentioned that while they had learned about classroom management in education courses, they never had the chance apply classroom management techniques themselves. While the service-learning experience featured the presence of many more adults than a normal classroom, participants were afforded some opportunity to assist in classroom management, either as the lead teacher or as a helper with students in small groups. Participants redirected student attention to the lesson at hand, assisted students as they completed activities, and quieted students who were disruptive during the lesson.

Turning to the second research question that was concerned with the challenges that presented themselves to WL candidates as they worked with a local community center teaching Spanish to K-4th graders, several participants mentioned the logistics of carrying out lessons at UCC. First, slightly more than half (*n* = 8) of the participants mentioned in at least one assignment the difficulty of getting to and from UCC and campus two miles away. Forty-six percent (*n* = 7) mentioned in at least one assignment the difficulty of effectively collaboratively implementing the UCC behavior management system across a number of adults. Additionally, 67% (*n* = 10) mentioned the difficulty of learning UCC students' names, particularly because the teacher candidate group was only there once a week for seven weeks.

Further challenges were noted by the researcher and UCC directors. One of the most challenging aspects of this service learning project was the WL teacher candidate to UCC student ratio, with teacher candidates occasionally outnumbering UCC students two to one, with 24 teacher candidates and 12 K-4 students. Another challenge concerned the difficulty of communication among stakeholders, particularly considering that the program described here is one of 17 programs that take place at the UCC. Follow-up discussions with community center directors, intended to make the experience better for both teacher candidates and those served by the center, were difficult to schedule in person and most took place via email. In one of the email exchanges the first year, one UCC director disclosed that "overall, we would admit that there are a lot of details to be ironed out as to how we can make this work better" (R. Young, personal communication, March 1, 2012). He went on to say that "We have seen a lot of disconnect and confusion and want to do whatever we can to amend those issues" (R. Young, personal communication, March 1, 2012). By the second year, many of the issues meriting attention were greatly improved, particularly related to teacher candidate concerns about classroom management vis-à-vis UCC expectations for student behavior and how to address such challenges in mutually satisfying ways.

Although it was anticipated that qualitative data sources would point to participation in the K-4th grade Spanish program as providing the benefit of bolstering teacher candidates' language skills, written data assignments did not elicit any mention of candidates' own linguistic development. Of the 15 participants, 80% ($n = 12$) already had demonstrated Advanced-Low oral proficiency and the remaining three had Intermediate-High oral proficiency, but none of these latter completed another Oral Proficiency Interview before the end of the seven-week-long program.

As outlined earlier, a number of benefits and challenges exist when implementing a service-learning project for WL teacher candidates. The humanistic, community-based, and classroom management benefits were slightly offset by logistical challenges and classroom management challenges, neither of which proved insurmountable.

## Discussion

The WL teacher preparation program and local community organization described here developed a "mutually beneficial relationship" (Lear & Abbott, 2009, p. 313). Relatively modest challenges arose, but the experience ultimately offered active learning situations that enhanced "work readiness skills" (Gascoigne Lally, 2001, p. 55) to teacher candidates, while engaging with real K-4th grade language learners. Results indicated that benefits to teacher candidates, however, were less linguistic in nature than anticipated. While designed with the intent to heed Fraga-Cañadas' (2010) call to help teacher candidates develop their language skills through service learning, this project did not prove to afford those opportunities. Although unlike the linguistic benefits described by Lear and Abbott (2009), this study's participants did however develop valuable pedagogic skills and humanistic attitudes.

Teacher candidates who participated in this study were able to apply language teaching practices under study in their methods class while working with K-4th grade learners. Drawing on Gascoigne Lally's (2001) work, this project provided teacher

candidates practical experiences with young, energetic learners. Reinforcing course objectives differentiates service learning from service (Lisman, 1998), and teaching at the community center provided participants a way to experience the successes and disappointments of an authentic teaching environment. Teacher candidates were able to take on what Reagan and Osborn (2002, p. 21) called the *role of teacher as decision-maker*, albeit in a limited time frame, and develop their knowledge of learners.

Classroom management was a topic of particular focus for the teacher candidates in this study, with benefits and struggles found. The high energy levels of the young learners surprised and challenged participants. All too frequently, language teacher candidates are disconnected from real language learners, unable to connect what they are learning in language pedagogy classes to subsequent language learning situations. Additionally, teacher candidates often find it difficult to transition from their student/observer role to their teacher/leader role (Gascoigne Lally, 2001). The sheer amount of classroom commotion can stun new teachers who may able to pay attention to only one stimulus at a time (e.g., helping an individual student or erasing the board with back to the class and not seeing other students' actions). With few teacher candidates managing an authentic classroom before student teaching, these individuals can find it overwhelming when they finally get the chance. The transition from student to teacher can be difficult (Gascoigne Lally, 2001) and participants were able to enact their own authority with the support of the course instructor and UCC directors. While several participants mentioned the positive aspects of learning to manage a classroom of young learners, dissonance between participants' classroom management techniques and the student behavior plan of the community center proved to be a challenge. Continued communication with UCC directors and clarification of student behavior expectations will undoubtedly help in the future, and other WL teacher education programs would be wise to consider existing behavior management practices at the setting while preparing for a service-learning project like the one described above.

The Communities standard (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) and connecting to members of the local community served emerged as benefits to teacher candidates. The *firsthand understanding* (Tilley-Lubbs, 2004) of the local community helps a teacher better meet the needs of the students in front of her. Teacher candidates were able to get to know students from backgrounds different from their own, an important part of learning to teach (Bott-VanHouten, Hoyt-Oukada, & Scow, 2003), as part of the described field experience. The enhanced cultural competence and sensitivity gained by participants were evident and allowed teacher candidates to reflect on their own role within and beyond the classroom (Bott-VanHouten, Hoyt-Oukada, & Scow, 2003).

Humanistic benefits, such as empathy and compassion, are frequently mentioned as benefits to service-learning project participants (Guarassi & Mapstone, 1998; Jacoby, 1996). This study is no different with all participants highlighting those attributes in at least one data source. Of course, teaching is a humanistic endeavor itself, so this result may not be surprising. Having students reflect on the service-learning experience, however, allowed all participants to articulate those attributes while engaging in what Reagan and Osborn (2002) call "reflection-on-practice" (p. 22) or the "retrospective reflection on what took place, both positive and negative,

during the classroom teaching event" (p. 23).

As their titles suggest, the WL methods courses at Illinois State University were originally developed with a distinction between theory and practice, with theory assumed to inform later practice. Previous student teacher observations and existing literature (Hellebrandt & Wurr, 2007; Gascoigne Lally, 2001) suggest that enforcing the paradigm of theory's superiority over practice leads to less effective language teacher learning and behaviors. With careful planning and open, ongoing communication, meaningful service-learning experiences can enhance WL teacher candidates' pedagogical development with opportunities for application of principles learned in the methods class. This article has reviewed some of the benefits and challenges faced by stakeholders of a Spanish teaching program for K-4th graders at a local community center, providing a promising service-learning model for other WL teacher education programs.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

This study is not without its limitations. First, the researcher was also the methods instructor who oversaw implementation of the service-learning project. Her perceptions may have been affected by carrying out these two roles simultaneously. Additionally, this study did not address the outcomes of the service-learning project from the perspective of the students they served. Further, data were limited to existing methods course assignments because teacher candidates' schedules did not allow for follow-up interviews to be carried out. Pre-planning with candidates' schedules in mind would facilitate the inclusion of follow-up interviews. Interview data would support triangulation of results and enrich the findings.

In the future, it would be interesting to investigate and measure the outcomes of this type of service-learning project. Investigation of subsequent WL teacher candidate performance to explore pedagogical practices that may have been influenced by involvement with the UCC program and its students would add much to the existing literature on service learning in WL teacher preparation programs. Measurement of K-4th grade student learning outcomes, including possible gains in their Spanish competencies, could also be examined to investigate possible correlations to the instruction delivered via the university / community center partnership.

This project has already contributed to a restructuring of the existing Illinois State University WL teacher education program. For example, the two courses listed above have been more evenly divided with each contributing three credits to the WL teacher preparation curriculum. Each of those methods courses are also offered every semester, beginning in the fall of 2013, and 14 weeks of UCC programming will be carried out as an integral part of the practical course. For example, once a week during the semester, WL teacher candidates will teach 45-minute Spanish lessons at UCC and then immediately debrief with classmates, the methods instructor/investigator, and UCC directors to maximize impact of the teaching experience. It is anticipated that WL teacher candidates, UCC students and directors will therefore more effectively have their needs met. Finally, in the future, it is expected that this program will be expanded to include French for both native speakers and non-native speakers of French at UCC.

Service learning for WL teacher candidates is a fertile area of investigation,

and this article has taken initial steps to examine the benefits and challenges to teacher candidates participating in a service learning project. Much remains to be done, however. WL teacher education program directors and methods instructors may find that service-learning projects can help WL teacher candidates gain some "real world" experience in a less formal teaching environment, while also providing needed assistance in the community.

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# 7

# Extending the Classroom: Digital Micro-Narratives for Novice Language Learners

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*Abstract*

*Digital Storytelling offers many advantages for language learning, especially within a project-based framework. In this article, the use of Digital Micro-Narratives is proposed as particularly useful for second language learners at the novice level. As a sub-genre of Digital Storytelling, Digital Micro-Narratives focus more on frequently updated content and continuous feedback and less on crafting a flawless final product, as is the case with more traditional Digital Storytelling. The value of Digital Micro-Narratives lies within a procedural framework that fosters agency, authenticity, the use of multiple modes and media, and which addresses individual learner differences and inspires identity formation.*

## Background

Digital storytelling (DST) is conceived in many ways, ranging from the narrowly defined "first person video-narrative" (Center for Digital Storytelling, 2014) to a broad spectrum of applications that may include a twitter feed, a blog post, or a Facebook thread as viable forms (Alexander, 2011; Fulwiler & Middleton, 2012). This article asserts that DST is a communicative activity that allows second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) teachers to extend the boundaries of the traditional classroom. It enables learners to create meaningful L2 communication both inside and outside of formal instruction time. In order to adapt the concept of DST to the realities of the L2 classroom, this author explores the use of Digital Micro-Narratives (DMNs) as a technology-supported instructional approach for novice L2 learners in secondary and postsecondary classrooms and as a way to help learners develop 21st century skills and communicative abilities.

DST in general is not part of a particular method or approach, but can be situated among constructivist approaches and categorized as part of a task-based curriculum. Digital stories are constructivist in nature because they allow learners to connect their existing knowledge, experiences, and skills with new material. With respect to task-based learning, creating such stories can be set up as a series of concrete tasks with clear goals and outcomes.

DST is learner-centered rather than teacher-centered in that learners are "the builders of their own cognitive tools, as well as of their external realities. In other words, knowledge and the world are both construed and interpreted through action, and mediated through symbol use" (Ackermann, 2004, p. 18). Moreover, DST is at

the same time an independent and a collaborative process because knowledge and world construal happen individually and collectively as learners share their work among peers. Accordingly, digital stories are a medium that provides both construction and dissemination channels. While DST is suitable for all levels of L2 learners, this article centers on novice L2 or FL learners and therefore highlights the use of DMNs. The short, concrete, frequently performed tasks of DMNs aptly lend themselves to a highly scaffolded instructional approach, which is consistent with the needs of beginning level language learners (Díaz-Rico, 2002; Macaro, 2010).

DMNs are a sub-genre of DST, and this author claims that they are particularly useful for L2 learners at the novice level, since they are frequently revised and are not encumbered with extensive scripting and editing. DMNs differ from more traditional DST in that while they do place a high value on authorship, they do not place as high a production value on extensive crafting and polishing of content. They are nonetheless coherent narratives, and thus are more than individual social media posts or disjointed chunks of information. For example, a student uploading a photo with a short narration several times a week over the course of the semester to a narration application, such as VoiceThread, and chronicling his or her daily leisure time activities would constitute a DMN. Each entry would be both a self-contained brief narrative as well as part of a larger, overarching narrative. As opposed to more traditional DST, the more frequent crafting of stories leads to less emphasis on form and final product, and more on process, authoring, and constant application. This focus on process should be the goal of DST in general and DMNs in particular (Chan, 2011; Nelson, 2006).

The use of multiple modes and media, such as images, sounds, motion, and narrative context, helps to bridge linguistic gaps and functions as scaffolding (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003). It is suggested here that because of these bridging and scaffolding characteristics, the use of DMNs fosters beginning L2 learners' creation of meaningful and authentic output. Through DMNs, learners make use of nonverbal communication modes, such as images or background music and sounds. Hull and Katz (2006) maintain that DST and DMNs provide a framework for projecting student voice and advancing agency, and thereby offer motivational advantages, minimize learner anxiety, and establish a safe space for learners to create alternate, multiple, or even hybrid identities. For example, learners can choose which aspects of their lives they are willing to share and thus either save face, present themselves more positively, or create interesting alter egos. Learners can also influence and manipulate their audience, and thus gain control of the discourse.

It is proposed that DMN activities are aligned with three of the FL national standards: Standard 1.3 *Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics*; Standard 5.1 *Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting*; and Standard 5.2 *Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment* (NSFLEP, 2006). These micro-narratives allow students to present information to the teacher and their peers inside the classroom but also beyond its physical boundaries through the use of digital media. DMNs create opportunities to connect with others beyond the classroom, and these connections hold potential to extend beyond the phase of formal instruction and lead to lifelong learning opportunities.

The following appraisal of the use of DMNs is divided into two sections. The first section, Extending the Classroom, deals with the different ways in which DST practices extend the classroom in general and includes discussions of modes and media, identity work, and flipping the classroom. The second section, Digital Micro-Narratives, uses these concepts as a basis for the adapted model of DMN as a proposed variant of DST, which is suitably adaptable for the teaching of FLs.

## Extending the Classroom

### Extending Modes and Media

Communication involves various modes, such as written texts, spoken words and visual information. In today's multimedia society, visual information is ubiquitous. Finnegan (2002) maintains that "the visual symbols override language differences and communicate more directly than written words" (p. 150). Kress (2003) posits that as visuals become more dominant, writing will undergo profound changes. It is clear that the use of visuals in language learning plays an important role. The convergence of old and new media is not a mere technological shift, but rather it is a changed media logic. Correspondingly, transmedia storytelling transcends previously accepted boundaries, making use of the different affordances of various media and combining their effects (Jenkins, 2006). The utilization of different modes, such as images, writing, gesture, speech, or music, offers new possibilities for creating meaning.

Neu (1990) argues that nonverbal competence is a crucial component of adult second language learners' overall communicative competence. Verbal output, for example, can be enhanced by music, sounds, utterances, or tone, and visual output can be manipulated through images, facial expressions, posture, or gestures. For instance, when talking about their morning routines, learners can add information such as the water is running while they are brushing their teeth by either creating the sound themselves or making the recording while water is running in the background. They could also show an image of running water. Novice language learners most likely do not know how to form a complicated sentence that involves two actions happening at the same time, but the affordances created by the storytelling tool allow the learner to convey this extra reinforcing information.

Extending the available modes and media can provide language learners with new vehicles for communication. For novice L2 learners, complementing oral and written information with nonverbal and non-written information allows for meaningful authorship experiences with the ability to provide narrative elements beyond speech and written text. Thus, more complex ideas and additional information can be generated through other modes, and meaning can be amplified by nonverbal information. Auditory information can be enhanced with the integration of music and utterances. Visual information can be enriched, complemented and manipulated by using images, facial expressions, posture, or gestures. Such additions allow learners to experiment with language at a very early stage. DST extends not only students' communicative toolkit by enabling the use of multiple modes and media, but also their authorship to a wider audience, which could be simply the learners' peers, but may include anyone who has access to the Internet.

*Creating and Maintaining Identities*

In the media culture we inhabit, multiple identities are common. Users manage and switch among multiple individual, social, connected and collective identities. Burr (1996) posits that language is a social phenomenon and that a person's identities are created through various forms of discourses. In today's environment, these identities exist not only in the physical world but increasingly in the digital realm, in social media, and in online discourse.

The development and maintenance of one's identity is inextricably intertwined with various forms of narratives, both fictional and nonfictional. The creation of an identity comprises narratives that a person constructs for him or herself as well as for others (Hull & Katz, 2006). Identities are not something learners have or innately possess but something that they continuously create, change and use (Grad & Martín Rojo, 2008). Learners produce meaning through the process of narrative production and identity construction. Telling digital stories not only allows for the presentation of the self (Hull & Nelson, 2008), but also cultivates a group identity of agents through a transitional object. The created narratives are such an object, allowing the students to externalize and share information, create narrative voices, and be part of an in-group of producers.

Removing oneself and enacting a different identity and a different role allows users to modify and adapt a persona in order to project a positive face and prevent a negative one (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Nelson (2006) recommended a potential leveling effect in multimodal communication for L2 learners by providing an alternative way of expressing oneself, one that does not solely rely on the L2. This is relevant for the relationship amongst the learners and for the asymmetric instructor-student connections, which can be especially inhibiting for beginning L2 learners. (Blake, 2008). Individualized, creative expression, such as through DST and DMNs, allows learners to craft identities that promise learner engagement (Erstad & Silseth, 2008), while supporting individual learning styles and strategies. As individual learner differences, such as learning styles, motivation, and creativity, have a significant influence on learner success, more flexible and varied tasks increase opportunities for developing L2 competencies (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2003).

## Digital Micro-Narratives (DMNs)

Whereas traditionally defined DST emphasizes form, written text, and a polished final product, DST is continuously moving towards a less defined and more open format (Alexander, 2011). Nonetheless, DMNs are oriented toward recursive application and are also adaptable to varied modes of expression. As explained above, novice language learners generally benefit from the use of varied modes of expression, which makes DMNs suitable for beginning L2 learners as they attempt communicate identity meaningfully. With access to diverse modes of expression and teacher support, novice learners are further enabled to develop an agentive self. DMNs promote flexibility for both teachers and students during early stages of students' L2 acquisition process.

What follows is a proposed set of criteria for the implementation of DMNs in L2 instruction: frequency, process and feedback, media and mode selection, task-

based learning, and identity work. These criteria are illustrated by examples of DMN learning activities.

*Frequency*

Frequency of use is a crucial criterion for DMNs, which sets it apart from DST, and allows learners to continuously and regularly spend time on task. Time that might be spent on elaborate editing in traditional DST can be applied instead toward producing a greater number of DMNs in the target language. While DST is often part of a special project, DMNs can be integrated throughout the semester. Repeated use of content and structures is encouraged, and learners may thereby experience less anxiety about language production. For example, a learner describing his meals throughout the semester may repeat similar phrases and structures but in varied forms.

Frequent implementation of DMN assignments is possible due to the use of easy-to-use tools such as VoiceThread, which is easy to learn and the technical aspects are relatively smple. Also, as learners repeatedly use the tool, time spent on the language task increases with decreased time and facility in use of the tool. Frequent production lends itself to the creation of an overarching narrative in which each entry is only one element in a larger unit. For example, students create one recording along with a visual for individual events - one for a shopping trip, one for a vacation, one for a day in school, and one for a weekend activity. These individual DMNs could then become a part of a creative portfolio or larger narrative of a learner's daily activities, in which the emphasis on each individual piece is reduced.

*Process and Feedback*

In a successful DMN, there must be balance in the amount of energy spent on process and aesthetics, which, even though they play an important role (Nyboe & Drotner, 2008), have the potential to reduce time using and practicing the target language. The instructor should set clear expectations for DMN assignments and share a balanced rubric early on with students to deter them from too much focus on production. Because DMNs can be produced and updated frequently, they offer multiple opportunities for feedback from both the instructor as well as fellow learners. Since digital technology features bidirectionality, learners benefit from being recipients as well as disseminators of knowledge (Kress, 203). Moreover, emotional engagement is an important component of both individual and group identity work. Thus novice learners can readily develop an L2 identity by creating content for their community of fellow L2 learners and receiving feedback from that community.

Because DMNs can be archived and shared easily, they can be readily used for assessment purposes. Sadik (2008) argues for appropriate assessment strategies for DST and suggests electronic reflective portfolios for formative assessment. A portfolio is useful in particular for DMNs as a practical means to catalog the quantity of work generated. A growing portfolio thus enables the possibility for pre-, mid-, and post-narrative reflection and assessment and provides students with rich, constant feedback—from the teacher and from peers—and allows them to revise or adapt their narratives accordingly.

*Media and Mode Selection*

A digital narrative created by a novice language learner has the potential to in-

spire genuine interest from a more advanced or a native speaker because of the use of multiple modes of narration that do not solely rely on L2 competence for meaning-fulness. For example, the expressive power of images or the use of tone and composition can create more meaningful and interesting content than if a story were simply told orally. All of these tools, whether they are installed software (e.g., Photo Story 3) or online (e.g., VoiceThread) produce digital media that are participatory, collaborative, and distributed (Alexander, 2011). These media are participatory because they allow the creator and others to access the narrative, comment on it, influence it, or rate it. Stories can be created by more than one individual, even if these users are not physically close. The media are widely distributed because they can be accessed by more than the creator and the instructor, and can be created and accessed on a variety of devices and platforms.

The instructor's ability to choose the tool, the medium and the modes of use allows for adaptation to students' needs and learning goals. If, for example, oral communication is the focus and the topic is food, a short VoiceThread narrative about a recipe or a narrated shopping list may be appropriate. If culturally authentic online materials are the focus, then a micro blog post (e.g., Tumblr) may be better suited for the task because students could choose freely among various modes and media. Another example may be the use of place-based digital stories and tools such as *woices.com*. During a study abroad program or a field trip, students could make use of the geographic significance of place, in addition to voice, text, and images. Hull and Katz (2006) discuss the expansion of our understanding of textual production and reception: "While broadly speaking, dance, music, and poetry might all be viewed as textual performances, digital stories, because they of necessity layer multiple media and modes, complicate our understandings of textual performance as it is linked to the development of identity and agency" (p. 47).

*Task-based Learning and Identity Work*

Micro-storytelling practices are very suitable for a task-based approach (Ellis, 2003). Because of the frequency and the limited scope of their content, learners are guided by achievable goals. Task-based language production, such as DMNs, can lead to increased motivational benefits (Egbert, 2003). Because of their frequency, there can be an overarching narrative that encompasses the smaller narratives. This larger narrative may function as an identity marker for their creators and allow for creative agency within a task-based framework.

Tasks are commonly used in L2 instruction, for example in textbooks, teacher prompts or in homework assignments. But they are moved into the open, into the community of learners, through the storytelling process. Creating shareable narratives connects students' existing worlds with newly acquired structures and information and thus personalizes the learning process, because the authentic and meaningful content is provided by the learners and not by an outside source, such as a textbook or a teacher. The narratives allow student work to leave the immediate environment of the classroom and contribute to a group of peers rather than simply the instructor or an automated Computer-Assisted Language Learning or CALL program. DMNs can foster ongoing identity work as they motivate students to assume different roles and experiment with different voices. Learning, then, becomes

contextualized, and as a result of the frequency of DMNs, it becomes a regular aspect of language learner identity.

Mackey (2009) discusses the appeal for young people to be experts in a changed media environment. The new reality is one where the teacher will no longer be all-knowing, but can and must increasingly rely on learners' knowledge and skills. Students might be more media-savvy, or they may have specialized knowledge of certain subject areas, such as contemporary music, internet memes, and popular movies. Instructors can leverage this knowledge and bring it back into the classroom through their learners. This fosters learner agency, learner control, self-confidence, and a participatory learning environment. According to Robbins (2003), this role reversal supports the student as a whole person, not only partial aspects of his or her personality, because it allows for increased input from the learners. The content provided no longer comes solely from the instructor and from teaching materials.

Tools that allow the student enough creative freedom within predefined parameters are ideal, such as VoiceThread or Photo Story 3. Restrictions provided by the software may function more as a channel and allow the user to quickly create multiple narratives without necessarily relying on heavy scripting. For example, the software may permit students to import only certain file types, or it may not allow them to add visual effects. Therefore it is important to choose software that does not involve a steep learning curve for students or that focuses heavily on technical aspects, such as with Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premiere Pro.

**Sample Digital Micro-Narratives**

While the integration of DMN into a FL class invites multiple possibilities, following are two examples of implementation:

*Example #1: Multimedia Diary*

*Software/tools required.* VoiceThread, a Web 2.0 tool that allows students to upload images (as well as videos or documents) and record a narration.

*Role of individual student/students as a group of peers.* Students are able to present an idealized identity of themselves to their peers through a multimedia diary and present information in a variety of verbal and nonverbal ways, such as using photos, drawings, sketches, music, or sounds. An assignment variation includes options for students to have access to classmates' DMNs and comment on each other's narratives.

*Role of instructor.* The instructor provides a rubric that establishes evaluative criteria for students and gives frequent individual student feedback throughout the semester - both formative and summative. Additionally, the instructor supplements individual guidance with group support in the form of posted questions, suggestions, and directions.

*Time required (inside/outside class).* The instructor gives students the task to chronicle their activities as a multimedia diary and asks them to create five posts per week, each of them consisting of an image and a brief verbal description of an activity they performed that day. The average time spent on task per entry is five to ten minutes. An initial learning and production session of approximately 20 minutes is advised for users to set up accounts and become familiar with the tool.

*Expected student learning outcomes.* As a result of successfully completing the Multimedia Diary assignment, novice language learners will be able to produce personalized, authentic, meaningful, verbal output outside of class. They will enhance their personal messages with multimodal forms of meaning, including sounds, images, and motion videos.

*Criteria/categories for evaluative rubric.* Possible criteria may include appropriateness and meaningfulness of content, accuracy, creativity and complexity of structures, quality of recordings and visuals, use of identified skills and materials.

*Example #2: Alter Ego*

*Software / tools required.* The tool in this example is Tumblr, a multimedia microblogging tool.

*Role of individual student/students as a group of peers.* Students in this class each take on a role, an alter ego. Their characters or avatars are digitally crafted personalities with fictional lives. Each DMN is an expression of their personalities. In contrast to Example #1, these DMNs are not limited by reality or the use of predefined modes (voice and images). Students may post interesting findings from the Internet in addition to status updates, shorter and longer written texts, videos, quotes, and voice recordings. These micro-blogs can refer to each other and create a network of learners, by using predefined tags or by creating links, for example. The students would thus be able to see their peers' DMNs but also be able to try out different identities, such as taking on the role of an older person or someone from another country or social background.

*Role of instructor.* The instructor provides continuous feedback because all DMNs are publicly available. Students are given tasks throughout the semester to develop their alter egos progressively, in response to new content introduced during the semester.

*Time required (inside/outside class).* An initial learning and production session is advised. Twenty minutes should suffice for users to set up accounts and become familiar with the tool. Time spent on task throughout the semester can differ, from only a few minutes per week to several hours per week. The majority of work time is outside of the classroom, although some content should be shared and presented during class time.

*Expected student learning outcomes.* As a result of successfully completing the Alter Ego assignment, novice language learners will be able to produce personalized, authentic, meaningful, written output outside of class. They will be able to consider alternative modes of expression and be able to practice 21$^{st}$ century discourse situations.

*Criteria/categories for evaluative rubric.* Possible criteria may include appropriateness of content, frequency, correctness, creativity and complexity of structures, quality of recordings and visuals, use of learned skills and materials.

**Conclusion**

Instructors may extend and enhance existing secondary or postsecondary cur-

ricula through the use of DST practices, in particular short, flexible, and frequently implemented narratives, known as micro narratives. These DMNs open the boundaries of traditional learning environments, are learner-centric, and are focused on achievable tasks (Ellis, 2003). The narratives are a collection of tasks, of achievable language goals, which advance self-confidence and make learning benchmarks more concrete. Because DMNs lend themselves to multiple opportunities for feedback, they hold potential for collaborative group work, extending beyond the level of individual assignments seen and evaluated solely by the teacher.

The resulting extension of the communicative face-to-face classroom with the use of DMNs gives learners agentive power and promotes ongoing and frequent feedback throughout the course of their studies. By extending the possibility of using different modes and media, novice L2 students can create meaningful content. This is true for general DST, but the affordances of frequent communicative expression offered through DMNs throughout a whole course are particularly suited for novice L2 learners.

As articulated above, this article conceptualizes DMNs for language learning and teaching purposes. Micro-narration supports an individualized instructional approach that places the learner at its center and can be used both as produced and as consumed media. The stories add an affective learning component to the curriculum and accommodate individual learner differences. Encouraging L2 communication by providing concrete and authentic DMN tasks fosters student engagement in and out of the classroom. In light of the promising use of DST in the FL curriculum, especially DMNs for novice L2 learners, there is a need for further studies. Future research should look into the effectiveness of such practices and should involve both quantitative and qualitative studies, including how the use of DST/DMNs addresses ACTFL Standards 1.3, 5.1 and 5.2. A future study designed to compare learning outcomes from a novice learner group producing DMNs throughout the semester with a group working on a traditional, project-based DST assignment would serve to enlighten the premises put forth in this article.

The utilization of creative affordances of various modes and of narrative technologies is a 21st century skill: "Now more than ever," Nelson (2006) argues, "we, our students and ourselves, need the highest level of understanding of the semiotic workings and affordances of language, as well as of other modes, in order to enact and facilitate powerful personal expression" (p. 72). DMNs add a layer of complexity and profoundness to the language learning experience that might otherwise be restricted by the learner's limited expressive capabilities, and allow learners to become active and engaged participants and producers rather than merely receivers of knowledge. The use of DMNs also supports learners' development of 21st century skills and communicative abilities that they will need beyond the formal classroom setting.

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# 8

# Skype Videoconferencing for Less Commonly Taught Languages: Examining the Effects on Students' Foreign Language Anxiety

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### Abstract

*This study compared students' foreign language anxiety levels while completing oral assessments administered face-to-face (F2F) and via Skype videoconferencing for university courses delivered under the self-instructional language program (SILP) model (Dunkel, Brill, & Kohl, 2002). Data were gathered by administering a modified Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) survey (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) and conducting subsequent interviews with the students. Results indicate that there was not a significant difference in anxiety levels or changes in anxiety between the two delivery methods. These findings suggest that Skype videoconferencing may be a viable alternative to F2F interviews, because it did not negatively impact the learners' anxiety levels.*

### Introduction

For many colleges and universities that offer courses for less commonly taught languages under the SILP model (Dunkel, Brill, & Kohl, 2002), a constant concern is providing an effective means of evaluating the students' oral proficiency. According to the SILP model, often without the presence of an official instructor, external examiners are brought in from outside institutions to conduct oral exams, which are intended to assess the students' oral proficiency. In some cases, for logistical reasons, programs have administered this type of oral exam via videoconferencing software.

Although it has become more commonplace to use videoconferencing software to administer such exams, there is no body of research that examines the effects of doing so on the students' levels of anxiety. Several researchers have investigated issues related to anxiety and the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Baralt & Gurzynski-Weiss, 2011; Satar & Ozdener, 2008); however, the effect of the videoconferencing format on foreign language learners' anxiety is relatively unresearched. As Poza indicates, tools such as videoconferencing have "the potential of breaking yet another barrier of the classroom environment: the high level of anxiety that students experience when participating in oral interaction in the L2" (2011, p. 34). Thus, as foreign language educators continue to implement innovative uses of such tools, it is imperative that studies document their effectiveness and impact on the language learning process, including the effects on students' levels of foreign language anxiety during oral assessments.

This study examines the impact of using a Skype interview oral testing format on students' foreign language anxiety levels. Adhering to a mixed method study design (Creswell, 2013), data are presented from the FLCAS survey (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) and subsequent interviews with the students. More specifically, the study compared the foreign language anxiety levels of students completing oral assessments administered F2F with anxiety levels of students completing the assessments via Skype videoconferencing. Additionally, comparisons were made between changes in anxiety levels across the semester and between beginning and intermediate language levels. The research questions addressed by the study were the following:

1. Is there a significant difference between Level I students' foreign language anxiety levels at the midterm of the semester and the end of the semester, as they complete the oral exam (regardless of delivery method)?

    1.a. Is there a significant difference between Level II students' foreign language anxiety levels at the midterm of the semester and the end of the semester, as they complete the oral exam (regardless of delivery method)?

2. Is there a significant difference between Level I students' foreign language anxiety levels and Level II students' foreign language anxiety levels at the midterm of the semester?

    2.a. Is there a significant difference between Level I students' foreign language anxiety levels and Level II students' foreign language anxiety levels at the end of the semester as they complete the oral exam (regardless of delivery method)?

3. Is there a significant difference in foreign language anxiety levels between students completing oral exams F2F and students completing oral exams via Skype videoconferencing?

4. Is there a significant difference in the changes in foreign language anxiety levels between students completing oral exams F2F and students completing oral exams via Skype videoconferencing?

**Literature Review**

According to some researchers, anxiety is one of the most important variables related to the language learning process. In fact, Horwitz (2001) believes foreign language anxiety to be the most influential affective factor impacting the language learning process. Broadly defined, foreign language anxiety is an uneasy state resulting when a non-native speaker attempts to learn or use a second language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). For a comprehensive review of foreign language anxiety research see Young (2014). This form of *situation specific anxiety* (Horwitz, 2001, 2010), which learners experience when asked to complete a specific task, often occurs when learners attempt to speak the language. Thus, as Horwitz (2010) points out, it is common for foreign language anxiety to invoke negative interference with the language learning process that impairs speaking performance. Ellis (1994)

documents a negative correlation between students' oral proficiency and their anxiety levels that reinforces the need for innovative approaches to alleviate this type of negative interference.

Many educators and researchers have turned to technology as a possible solution to reduce students' foreign language anxiety levels; however, the results of these studies have been mixed. Most have focused on text-based, CMC and voice conferencing. For example, while implementing a computer-mediated, information-gap task with intermediate Spanish students, Baralt and Gurzynski-Weiss (2011) found that anxiety was comparable during the computer-mediated task and the F2F task. In addition, the students did not express a strong preference for one medium over the other. Another study compared learners' anxiety as they completed language courses via distance learning or F2F (Pichette, 2009). In this study no significant differences were found in anxiety between classroom learners and distance learners. Thus, these two studies do not indicate that anxiety levels are reduced by the use of technologies.

On the other hand, a series of studies investigating the impact of Wimba voice boards on students' oral proficiency and anxiety has demonstrated reductions in learners' anxiety. Cho and Carey (2001) found that using Wimba reduced the pressure Korean students experienced when completing oral interviews F2F with an examiner. Additionally, they documented a reduction in overall anxiety. Other research has supported the anxiety-reduction effect of Wimba voice boards in administering oral proficiency tasks (McIntosh, Braul, & Chao, 2003). More recently, Poza (2011) indicated that there is a "strong potential for reduction of anxiety in the Wimba environment," which she attributes to the elimination of the time pressure frequently associated with F2F or synchronous tasks.

This body of literature illustrates the capability of technology to alleviate factors contributing to students' anxiety in text-based CMC and voice boards. However, to date, researchers have not addressed the role videoconferencing may play in reducing students' foreign language anxiety during oral assessments. As Godwin-Jones (2005) indicates, such "technologies offer intriguing opportunities for language professionals and learners, as they provide additional channels for oral communication" (p. 9). Tools such as Adobe Connect, Cisco WebEx, Google Hangouts, GoToMeeting, and Skype have the potential to connect learners with other learners, native speakers, and examiners. In addition, they provide access to audio and video feeds, which allow learners to process visual clues as they attempt to communicate. This capability is extremely important, especially for less commonly taught languages, where resources are scarce (LeLoup & Ponterio, 1998).

### The Study

This study investigated the use of Skype videoconferencing for completing oral exams in a university Russian course to determine if there was a significant difference in the foreign language anxiety levels of students completing oral interviews conducted F2F and students completing oral interviews conducted via Skype videoconferencing. The study extended over four years and included six sections of Level I (1001 & 1002) and six sections of Level II (2001 & 2002) Russian courses. Adhering to Creswell's (2013) description of a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, the study was implemented in two phases. In the quantitative phase, the FLCAS sur-

vey was administered to gauge the students' anxiety levels. This was followed by the qualitative phase, consisting of follow-up interviews with the students to verify and explain the findings of the FLCAS.

*Context and Participants*

The Russian courses under study were offered via a critical languages program employing the SILP model to administer language courses not offered under the regular curriculum of the department. Thus, the students completed a self-directed study of the language with guidance from an international student tutor and an external faculty examiner who provided suggestions for the curriculum and administered the final oral exam. In these courses the oral exam served as the primary evaluation for determining students' overall course grades. Traditionally, these oral exams had been administered F2F; however, beginning in the fall of 2010 the option for a Skype-based videoconferencing oral exam was presented.

Each semester the director of the critical languages program, the external examiner, and the student tutors for the courses suggested topics and co-constructed oral exam guidelines to ensure that the material tested in the interview was appropriate and had been covered throughout the semester. Appendix A is an example of the oral exam guidelines for RUSS 1001. Within each broader topic there were several follow-up questions designed to maintain the conversation-style interview. For the F2F and Skype-based interview assessments, the students conversed with the external examiner who holds a doctorate in Russian and regularly teaches undergraduate Russian courses at another institution. F2F interviews were conducted in an office space on campus; students completed the videoconferencing sessions while sitting at an individual computer station located in the department's lab space and utilizing a webcam and headset. Overall, the interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes, and the students were evaluated with a focus on communicability (listening comprehension and ability to form a response) and grammatical correctness (see Appendix B). The exam guidelines and the grading rubrics remained the same for the F2F and the videoconferencing exams.

More specifically, the participants of this study ($N = 81$) were university students enrolled in 12 sections of Level I and Level II Russian courses over a period of four years, 2010-2013. All of the students enrolled in the Russian courses were invited to take part in the study; however, only responses from native English speakers were included in analysis. Thus, data collected from heritage Russian speakers were discarded from the data set. Most of the participants were true beginners to studying Russian. Only four had studied Russian previously, either independently or at the high school level. Table 1 shows the demographics for the participants by course level, average age, and sex.

**Table 1**

*Student demographic data by course level.*

| | Students completing F2F interviews | | | | Students completing Skype interviews | | | | Total | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | Mean Age | Female | Male | n | Mean Age | Female | Male | n | Female | Male |
| RUSS 1001 | 15 | 22 | 9 | 6 | 21 | 24 | 15 | 6 | 36 | 24 | 12 |
| RUSS 1002 | 6 | 24 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 21 | 5 | 4 | 15 | 8 | 7 |
| RUSS 2001 | 8 | 21 | 5 | 3 | 10 | 22 | 8 | 2 | 18 | 13 | 5 |
| RUSS 1002 | 5 | 23 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 21 | 4 | 3 | 12 | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 34 | 22 | 19 | 15 | 47 | 22 | 32 | 15 | 81 | 51 | 30 |

*Instruments*

Within this mixed-method study the researcher utilized the FLCAS and a follow-up interview with selected student participants. First, the FLCAS (Horwitz, et al., 1986) was used to measure the participants' foreign language anxiety related to listening comprehension and speaking skills. Similar to other studies (Pichette, 2009; Poza, 2011), several of the survey items were removed from the instrument if they did not relate directly to speaking and listening skills (see Appendix C) and the wording of the items was adjusted to accommodate Skype videoconferencing. The FLCAS uses a 5-point Likert scale for its responses, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Survey results were tabulated as total scores with a minimum score of 17 and a maximum score of 85 (see Appendix D). The survey was administered to all student participants at the midterm of the semester of the respective courses to establish a base point for the individual students. Then, the FLCAS was administered again after the oral interviews were completed at the end of the semester.

In addition, interviews were conducted with eight students, roughly 10 percent of the total participants. As Adler and Adler (2012) describe, "a small number of cases, or subjects, may be extremely valuable," especially if they provide access to unique populations, which arguably may be the case when dealing with smaller student populations such as those from critical language programs (p. 8). The interview questions were based heavily on the previous work of Poza (2011). These interviews were used to verify and explain the findings from the FLCAS. Specifically, the students' perceptions of the oral interviews were collected to assist in further defining the potential role of videoconferencing for oral assessments. The questions were designed to elicit responses related to the students' perceptions of using Skype videoconferencing for the oral interview process and its effect on students' anxiety (see Appendix E). Last, the participants were selected based on willingness and availability.

*Data Analysis*

To begin data analysis, the participants' FLCAS scores were tabulated as totals. The quantitative analysis for these data involved descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency, variability, and percentages. In addition, *t-tests* were performed for statistical comparison between groups. The qualitative analysis comprised three recursive processes: category construction, data verification, and testing and confirming (Merriam, 2009). As such, the transcriptions of the follow-up interviews were systematically coded according to the a priori themes and categories established by the interview prompts: comfort with using Skype, speaking the target language, perceived level of anxiety, and the physical presence of the examiner. Other emerging themes were identified where appropriate using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).The primary intent of this qualitative stage of data analysis was to verify, refute, or explain the statistical findings resulting from the students' FLCAS scores through triangulation Creswell (2013).

## Findings

The data contained 81 observations of a study on the anxiety levels of Russian students during an oral exam, as reported on the FLCAS. The observations were further classified into two different course levels (Level I and Level II) as well as two different ways the oral exam was administered, F2F and via Skype videoconferencing. Appendix D contains the students' FLCAS scores tabulated as totals, including the course level, delivery mode of the oral interview, the pre- and post-administration of the FLCAS, and the resulting changes in FLCAS scores. The following sections highlight the pertinent findings of the study as they relate to the research questions.

*Findings for Research Question One.*

1. *Is there a significant difference between Level I students' foreign language anxiety levels at the midterm of the semester and the end of the semester as they complete the oral exam (regardless of delivery method)?*

1a. *Is there a significant difference between Level II students' foreign language anxiety levels at the midterm of the semester and the end of the semester, as they complete the oral exam (regardless of delivery method)?*

The mean anxiety scores for Level I students were 47.21 at the midterm and 60.09 at the end of the semester. A paired t-test was performed to determine the difference in anxiety levels between the midterm and end of term administration of the FLCAS for the Level I students and then again for Level II students, regardless of delivery method. The results shown in Table 2 indicate that there was a significant difference between the anxiety levels reported at the midterm versus the end of term during the oral exam for Level I students. This finding indicates that there was a statistically significant increase in the students' foreign language anxiety levels, an average increase of 12.88 points. Thus, the students reported higher anxiety levels after completing the oral exam.

**Table 2**

*Question 1 t-test results.*

| Course Level | Test | M | SD | 95% Lower Confidence Level | 95% Upper Confidence Level | T | df | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Pre-test | 47.21 | 13.86 | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Posttest | 60.09 | 12.18 | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Comparison | 12.88 | 7.41 | -14.97 | -10.80 | -12.42 | 50 | <.0001 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Pre-test | 39.93 | 7.94 | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Posttest | 50.00 | 8.81 | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Comparison | 10.06 | 5.55 | -12.14 | -7.99 | -9.92 | 29 | <.0001 |

With regard to the Level II students in RUSS 2001 or 2002, the mean anxiety scores were 39.33 at the midterm and 50.00 at the end of the semester. The results shown in Table 2 indicate that there was also a significant difference between the anxiety levels reported at the midterm versus the end of term during the oral exam for Level II students. The Level II students' anxiety levels also increased at the end of the semester; however, the mean change (10.06) was slightly lower than the Level I students reported change in anxiety (12.88).

Several students, from both Level I and Level II, noted the increased pressure related to completing the oral exam because it accounted for the majority of the course grade. When asked, "What is your overall opinion of the oral interview?," the students indicated:

> *The class itself is not too bad, but everything comes down to the oral exam. I was feeling very anxious about doing the exam. Honestly, now I feel uptight wondering how I did. It's just a lot of pressure at the end of the semester and it counts so much.*

> *I am not a fan of the oral exam counting so much towards the final grade. I would rather have a mix of grades so that if you do poorly on one thing, you have a chance to make it up in other assignments.*

In addition to the pressure associated with a high-stakes exam, another theme that emerged in relation to the oral exams was that of having to speak the target language. The Level I students described this aversion to speaking Russian during the oral exam:

> *The oral exam was tough. I know we practiced all semester to be able to speak the language, but it still made me nervous to speak to the examiner completely in Russian. I wish we had a written exam like most other classes. I couldn't help being so nervous during the exam.*

> *Of course I was more nervous during the interview. It was the first time I had to speak entirely in Russian for such a long time, with no dictionary, no English.*

Corroborated by these testimonies, the follow-up interviews further evidenced the increases in anxiety at the end of the semester that were initially documented by the students' responses to the FLCAS survey.

*Findings for Research Question Two.*

2. *Is there a significant difference between Level I students' foreign language anxiety levels and Level II students' foreign language anxiety levels at the midterm of the semester (regardless of delivery method)?*

2a. *Is there a significant difference between Level I students' foreign language anxiety levels and Level II students' foreign language anxiety levels at the end of the semester as they complete the oral exam (regardless of delivery method)?*

Referring to Tables 2 and 3, it is important to note again that the mean anxiety scores for Level I and Level II students at the midterm were 47.21 and 39.93, respectively. At the end of the semester the mean anxiety scores were 60.09 and 50.00. An independent t-test was performed to see if there was a significant difference between the anxiety levels of Level I and Level II students at the semester midterm and then again at the end of the semester. The results shown in Table 3 indicate that there was a significant difference between the anxiety levels of Level I and Level II students at the midterm and at the end of the semester. Thus, at both points in the semester Level I students reported higher anxiety levels than the Level II students.

**Table 3**

*Question 2 t-test results.*

| Course Level | Test | *M* | *SD* | *95% Lower Confidence Level* | *95% Upper Confidence Level* | *T* | *df* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Pre-test | 47.21 | 13.86 | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Posttest | 39.93 | 7.94 | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Comparison | 7.29 | 12.01 | 2.47 | 12.10 | 3.01 | 79 | <.01 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Pre-test | 60.10 | 12.18 | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Posttest | 50.00 | 8.81 | - | - | - | - | - |
| | Comparison | 10.10 | 11.07 | 5.03 | 15.17 | 3.97 | 79 | <.001 |

In this case, the follow-up interviews revealed some underlying reasons for the difference in anxiety between the two levels. The Level II students described their language learning experience and increased opportunities for speaking as factors, which contributed to their lower anxiety at both points in the semester. Consider the following statements from Level II students:

> *At this level we already know what we have to do, and we have had more experience and practice. If you do something for one semester or you do it for two years, there is a big difference. I remember when I first took Russian. I was very nervous about speaking, but now after doing it so much I don't think about it like that.*

> *I used to worry more about talking in class, but not as much now. I try to talk in Russian as much as I can, in class and outside of class, and it's probably easier because I do it all the time.*

> *After doing this for a few semesters, I really don't think about having to talk in Russian, I think more about what I want to say and if I can do it without help.*

Thus, the Level II students participating in this study attributed their lower anxiety to "*experience and practice.*"

*Findings for Research Question Three*

> 3. *Is there a significant difference in foreign language anxiety levels between students completing oral exams F2F and students completing oral exams via Skype videoconferencing?*

The mean anxiety score for students completing the oral exams F2F was 57.47, and the mean for students utilizing Skype was 55.55. Results of the independent t-test indicated that there was not a significant difference between the two delivery methods. Thus, the students' anxiety levels did not differ significantly whether they completed the oral exam F2F or via Skype videoconferencing.

Drawing from the follow-up interviews, several explanations were offered to explain the lack of a significant difference in anxiety levels between the students completing F2F interviews and those completing Skype-based interviews. For example, the majority of the students completing Skype-based interviews indicated they had experience with using Skype prior to the oral interview and they felt comfortable "*talking online.*" When asked, "How would you describe your level of anxiety when speaking in Skype?" the students replied:

> *It was the oral exam that made me feel anxious, not using Skype.*

> *I use Skype all of the time. It didn't bother me at all. It may have been less intimidating, because the examiner wasn't really there next to me.*

> *Talking online is not a big deal. Maybe it used to be, but any more I do it all time.*

Thus, the students' familiarity with Skype appeared to have helped maintain their anxiety levels similar to the F2F group. In addition, several students referenced feeling "*less intimidated,*" because the examiner was not physically present during the oral interview.

*Findings for Question Four*

> 4. *Is there a significant difference in the changes in foreign language anxiety levels between students completing oral exams F2F and via Skype videoconferencing?*

The mean change in anxiety scores for students completing the oral exams F2F was 11.82, and the mean change for students utilizing Skype was 11.85, a .03-point difference. To answer question four, an independent t-test was performed to see if there is a significant difference in the changes of anxiety levels for the two delivery methods. Results indicated that there was not a significant difference between the

changes in anxiety levels for the students utilizing the two delivery methods.

When asked specifically about changes in anxiety throughout the semester, two students responded with the following:

> Of course I felt more anxious at the oral interview. Earlier in the semester I only had to worry about participating in class. At the oral exam I had to worry about my grade. If I did poorly, it means I would get a bad grade. It really had nothing to do with Skype, but I know I was more anxious at the end of the semester.

> Using Skype didn't bother me, but the end of this course was extremely nerve-racking. You only get one shot with the final exam and everything depends on this one shot and the opinion of the examiner.

Thus, the statistical data and the follow-up interviews support the idea that the use of Skype videoconferencing did not negatively or positively affect the students' anxiety as they completed the oral interviews in the context of this study.

## Discussion

With regard to the first research question about differences in anxiety levels between the midterm and the end of the semester, results from this study indicate that anxiety levels increased significantly near the oral interviews for Level I and II students, regardless of exam delivery mode. Respectively, the students experienced 12.88- and 10.06-point increases in anxiety. One would expect such an increase in anxiety based on the nature of the SILP model, which emphasizes the end-of-term oral exam. In addition, previous research has documented that many students experience anxiety in response to having their speaking skills evaluated (Chen, Horwitz, & Schaller, 1999; Horwitz, 2010). Qualitative data gathered from the interviews support this finding as well.

Results from data collected to address the second research question, on differences in anxiety levels between Level I and Level II students at the midterm and the end of the semester, indicate that Level II students experienced lower anxiety than the Level I students at the midterm and the end of the semester as they completed the oral exam, regardless of delivery mode. The difference in the FLCAS scores at the midterm was 7.28 points, and the difference after completing the oral exam was 10.09 points. Although these differences are not drastic, they do yield statistically significant results. To explain these differences, it is informative to review previous research (Frantz & Magnan, 2005; Kitano, 2001; Liu, 2006; Marcos-Llinás & Garau, 2009), which reveals that foreign language anxiety is typically higher for beginners. Another plausible explanation is that students who experience high anxiety in lower level courses may not continue to the intermediate level. Thus, by default the Level II students may begin with a lower mean score on anxiety. Similarly, students who performed well in the beginning courses may have experienced an increase in confidence of their speaking skills by the time they are at the intermediate level, which contributes to decreasing their anxiety.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study lies in the results for question three, which examines the differences in levels of anxiety between students

completing the oral assessment F2F and students completing the assessment via Skype videoconferencing. These results indicate no significant difference in foreign language anxiety levels. This finding is not consistent with the body of previous research related to CMC and anxiety that has shown the ability of technology to reduce foreign language learners' anxiety (Cho & Carey, 2001; McIntosh, Braul, & Chao, 2003; Poza, 2011). Rather, it substantiates other studies that found no significant differences in anxiety levels between F2F students and students completing CMC tasks (Baralt & Gurzynski-Weiss, 2011) and between F2F students and distance language learning students (Pichette, 2009). Although this study did not determine that Skype videoconferencing reduces students' foreign language anxiety when compared with F2F interviews, an absence of increased anxiety may warrant the use of Skype videoconferencing for similar assessments when F2F exchanges are not possible. In addition, the interviews revealed that students felt comfortable completing the oral exams via Skype, because most students had prior experience with the format.

Results for question four, which addresses changes in anxiety levels between students conducting the oral assessments F2F and students using Skype videoconferencing, highlight that there was not a significant difference for the changes in anxiety between the two delivery modes. In fact, as Table 3 indicates, the difference in the mean anxiety scores for the control and experimental groups was only .03 points. Thus, the reported changes in foreign language anxiety were consistent regardless of exam delivery mode. As noted previously, this finding could be attributed to the students' familiarity with Skype or their increased concern with being formally evaluated (Chen, Horwitz, & Schaller, 1999; Horwitz, 2010).

### Limitations of the Study

There are several noteworthy limitations to this study. First and foremost, the data collected was self-reported. Thus, the student participants of this study may have provided responses they felt the researcher would want or expect, similar to the Hawthorne effect (Franke & Kaul, 1978). In this manner, a lack of self-awareness on behalf of the students may have also affected the data. Second, the research was conducted with a relatively small sample size. To bolster the potential of the generalizability of the findings, larger samples should be studied. Third, the study focused on the use of Skype videoconferencing to conduct oral exams for a self-instructional Russian university course. Therefore, the results may not apply to other settings or technologies. Last, only a few of the students were willing to participate in follow-up interviews with the researcher. With a limited number of participant interviews, it is difficult to establish whether their perceptions were unique within the group or to be considered representative of the entire group. Similarly, this limits the generalizability of the findings.

### Implications

Overall, with regard to oral assessments, the findings of this study offer mixed support for Poza's statement that new tools, such as videoconferencing, have potential to lower "the high level of anxiety that students experience when participating in oral interaction in the L2" (2011, p. 34). While the results demonstrate that utiliz-

ing Skype videoconferencing to complete the oral exams did not negatively affect the students' foreign language anxiety while completing oral assessments, Skype did not assist with lowering the students' anxiety. As stated previously, a result of no significant difference may be enough to support further use of videoconferencing in limited contexts.

After implementing the Skype videoconferencing tool as a means of conducting the oral exams for the Russian courses, there are also several practical implications that can be drawn from the experience. First, it was useful to provide a short demonstration of how to use the Skype application to all those involved. Although it is simple to operate and many people have used Skype previously, there is always the possibility that an individual may not know how to access or use the software. Second, it is also important to consider implementing the videoconferencing sessions in a controlled environment such as a computer lab or office. In this case, doing so afforded the students privacy and access to immediate technical support if needed. Third, it was advantageous to conduct test Skype calls with the examiner prior to administering the official oral exams. This enabled troubleshooting without the pressure of completing the exam.

In closing, this study demonstrates in part how technology has the potential to facilitate course offerings in less commonly taught languages delivered by the SILP model by providing an easy-to-use solution for oral assessments, which in this context did not negatively impact students' anxiety levels. Future research should be conducted to investigate how the use of videoconferencing may impact the results of such oral interviews in comparison with F2F interviews. Additionally, researchers may want to explore the impact of videoconferencing for interpersonal oral exchanges without the context of a high-stakes exam.

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**Appendix A**

*Russian Oral Exam Guidelines 1001 level:*

Name: _____    Grade: _____ / 80

On the day of the oral exam, you will receive 4 or 5 of these topics and their follow-up questions in the target language. You will have 2-3 minutes for each topic. In your responses be sure to use various verbs, vocabulary words, and verb tenses where appropriate. Remember, your grade will reflect communicability and grammatical correctness.

You are expected to be able to understand and use the expressions and vocabulary listed in each chapter of your textbook. During the interview, do your best to communicate with me. It is okay to ask for a repetition, to speak more slowly and so on, but you should do so in the target language not English. You will get some points when you make yourself understood even with grammatical errors. Do your best to use complete sentences. Try to avoid one or two word responses. The exam time is roughly 15 minutes per student.

1.  Basic conversation pieces:
    a.  Greetings
    b.  How are you?
    c.  What is your name?
    d.  Nice to meet you
    e.  Goodbyes

2.  Daily conversation pieces:
    a.  What time is it?
    b.  What day is it?
    c.  What month is it?
    d.  What is the date?

3.  Describe your typical daily activities:
    a.  What do you do?
    b.  Where do you go?
    c.  Do you study, work, etc.?

4.  Naming classroom objects and describing them:
    a.  Be prepared to describe a picture or an item in class
    b.  Describe colors, size, etc.

5.  Talk about university life:

a.  What classes are you taking?
b.  How many classes do you have?
c.  What is your major?
d.  What are you studying?
e.  Who are your professors?
f.  What classes do you like?

6.  Talking about languages
    a.  What is your nationality?
    b.  What language do you know or study?

7.  Talking about clothing
    a.  What do you wear?
    b.  What color is it?
    c.  Indicate what you have
    d.  Name clothing items

**Appendix B**

Rubric for the oral exam:

Question #1:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Communicability - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Question #2

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Communicability - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Question #3:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Communicability - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Question #4

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Communicability - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

*Question #5* – This question can be provided in the event that there is some trouble or disconnect with one of the previous questions. The grade recorded for this question may be substituted for one of the previous questions at the examiner's discretion.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Communicability - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

*Total:*

Grammar Total Score          _____ /40

Communicability Total Score  _____ /40

Final Grade = _____ /80

**Appendix C**

*Modified Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale.*

A.  Midterm Instructions: Think about your experience in language classes and indicate how you feel about the following statements. Select the appropriate option after each question.

B.  End of Term Instructions: You have just completed the oral interview with the outside examiner. Think about this experience and indicate how you feel about the following statements. Select the appropriate option after each question ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Agree

1.  I didn't feel quite sure of myself when I was speaking Russian during the Skype interview.

2.  I didn't worry about making mistakes in Russian during the Skype interview.

3.  I trembled when I had to speak Russian during the Skype interview.

4.  It frightened me when I didn't understand what the examiner said in Russian during the Skype interview.

5.  I think the other students completed the interview better in Russian during the Skype interview.

6.  During the Skype interview I was so nervous I forgot things I know about Russian.

7.  It embarrassed me to answer in Russian to the examiner during the Skype interview.

8.  I was not nervous speaking Russian with the examiner during the Skype interview.

9.  I felt confident when I spoke Russian during the Skype interview.

10. I was afraid that the examiner was going to correct every mistake I made in Russian during the Skype interview.

11. I felt my heart pounding when I was going to speak Russian during the Skype interview.

12. I feel that the other students did better in Russian than I did during the Skype interview.

13. I didn't feel very self-conscious about speaking Russian during the Skype interview because the examiner was not present physically.

14. I felt more tense and nervous speaking Russian in the Skype interview.

15. I was nervous and confused when I was speaking Russian during the Skype interview.

16. I was nervous when I didn't understand every word the examiner said in Russian during the Skype interview.

17. I was afraid that the examiner would laugh at me when listening to my Russian.

## Appendix D

*FLCAS Tabulated Scores by Student*

| Course level | Delivery mode | Midterm FLCAS Score | End of Term FLCAS Score | Change in Anxiety |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | F2F | 46 | 61 | 15 |
| 1 | F2F | 56 | 62 | 6 |
| 1 | F2F | 33 | 36 | 3 |
| 1 | F2F | 72 | 71 | -1 |
| 1 | F2F | 43 | 66 | 23 |
| 1 | F2F | 67 | 77 | 10 |
| 1 | F2F | 38 | 65 | 27 |
| 1 | F2F | 47 | 68 | 21 |
| 1 | F2F | 58 | 66 | 8 |
| 1 | F2F | 41 | 48 | 7 |
| 1 | F2F | 52 | 69 | 17 |
| 1 | F2F | 75 | 72 | -3 |
| 1 | F2F | 21 | 43 | 22 |
| 1 | F2F | 32 | 41 | 9 |
| 1 | F2F | 37 | 58 | 21 |
| 1 | Skype | 39 | 57 | 18 |
| 1 | Skype | 52 | 62 | 10 |
| 1 | Skype | 29 | 45 | 16 |
| 1 | Skype | 72 | 72 | 0 |
| 1 | Skype | 47 | 63 | 16 |
| 1 | Skype | 59 | 75 | 16 |
| 1 | Skype | 45 | 66 | 21 |
| 1 | Skype | 47 | 66 | 19 |
| 1 | Skype | 48 | 61 | 13 |
| 1 | Skype | 41 | 48 | 7 |
| 1 | Skype | 52 | 67 | 15 |
| 1 | Skype | 69 | 72 | 3 |
| 1 | Skype | 33 | 42 | 9 |
| 1 | Skype | 32 | 41 | 9 |

| 1 | Skype | 44 | 55 | 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Skype | 44 | 52 | 8 |
| 1 | Skype | 34 | 43 | 9 |
| 1 | Skype | 31 | 45 | 14 |
| 1 | Skype | 62 | 70 | 8 |
| 1 | Skype | 58 | 74 | 16 |
| 1 | Skype | 34 | 53 | 19 |
| 1 | F2F | 46 | 65 | 19 |
| 1 | F2F | 56 | 62 | 6 |
| 1 | F2F | 33 | 46 | 13 |
| 1 | F2F | 66 | 77 | 11 |
| 1 | F2F | 43 | 66 | 23 |
| 1 | F2F | 67 | 77 | 10 |
| 1 | Skype | 38 | 65 | 27 |
| 1 | Skype | 47 | 66 | 19 |
| 1 | Skype | 58 | 69 | 11 |
| 1 | Skype | 45 | 57 | 12 |
| 1 | Skype | 54 | 79 | 25 |
| 1 | Skype | 75 | 72 | -3 |
| 1 | Skype | 21 | 33 | 12 |
| 1 | Skype | 32 | 41 | 9 |
| 1 | Skype | 37 | 58 | 21 |
| 2 | F2F | 33 | 44 | 11 |
| 2 | F2F | 40 | 55 | 15 |
| 2 | F2F | 23 | 29 | 6 |
| 2 | F2F | 44 | 52 | 8 |
| 2 | F2F | 27 | 35 | 8 |
| 2 | F2F | 34 | 41 | 7 |
| 2 | F2F | 45 | 57 | 12 |
| 2 | F2F | 43 | 58 | 15 |
| 2 | Skype | 32 | 49 | 17 |
| 2 | Skype | 40 | 48 | 8 |
| 2 | Skype | 43 | 49 | 6 |
| 2 | Skype | 32 | 42 | 10 |
| 2 | Skype | 25 | 41 | 16 |
| 2 | Skype | 43 | 41 | -2 |

| 2 | Skype | 39 | 56 | 17 |
| 2 | Skype | 44 | 61 | 17 |
| 2 | Skype | 51 | 53 | 2 |
| 2 | Skype | 41 | 36 | -5 |
| 2 | F2F | 47 | 56 | 9 |
| 2 | F2F | 41 | 49 | 8 |
| 2 | F2F | 49 | 62 | 13 |
| 2 | F2F | 52 | 61 | 9 |
| 2 | F2F | 45 | 59 | 14 |
| 2 | Skype | 55 | 59 | 4 |
| 2 | Skype | 33 | 48 | 15 |
| 2 | Skype | 36 | 47 | 11 |
| 2 | Skype | 42 | 58 | 16 |
| 2 | Skype | 36 | 43 | 7 |
| 2 | Skype | 34 | 49 | 15 |
| 2 | Skype | 49 | 62 | 13 |

## Appendix E

Interview Questions (adapted from Poza, 2011)

1. Describe your experience with using Skype prior to the oral interview.
2. Describe your experience with using Skype to complete the oral interview.
3. What was the best thing about using Skype?
4. What was the worst thing about using Skype?
5. What is your overall opinion about the oral interview?
6. What is your overall opinion about the having to use Skype to complete the oral interview?
7. What is your opinion of the Skype software?
8. In your opinion, what aspects of this technology are positive and negative for language learning?
9. How did you feel when speaking through Skype?
10. How did you feel about speaking in general during the oral interview?
11. How did you feel about making mistakes during the oral interview?
12. How did you feel about understanding or not understanding what the examiner said?
13. How would you describe your level of anxiety when speaking in Skype?

14. How did Skype affect your ability to speak during the oral interview?

15. How did you feel about the fact that the examiner was not physical present during the oral interview?

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