

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SECOND LANGUAGE
INSTRUCTION AND MOTIVATION**

An Honors Fellows Thesis

by

LARA ASHLEY SPEIGHTS

Submitted to the Honors Programs Office
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as

HONORS UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOW

April 2010

Major: English
Spanish

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SECOND LANGUAGE
INSTRUCTION AND MOTIVATION**

An Honors Fellows Thesis

by

LARA ASHLEY SPEIGHTS

Submitted to the Honors Programs Office
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as

HONORS UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOW

Approved by:

Research Advisor:

Associate Director of the Honors Programs Office:

Valerie Balester

Dave A. Louis

April 2010

Major: English
Spanish

ABSTRACT

Comparative Analysis of Second Language Instruction and Motivation. (April 2010)

Lara Ashley Speights
Department of English
Department of Spanish
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Valerie Balester
Department of English

How do we explain when high school students graduate and are barely able to communicate Spanish? With the growth of global interdependence, students within the United States need to be realistically prepared for an international world around them. And yet, our second language instruction continues to produce beginning-level speakers, while many other world players produce bilingual adults. The classroom environment is integral to understanding this discrepancy, and so this research compares high school second language instruction in Buenos Aires, Argentina and College Station, Texas.

The purpose of this study is to explain theoretical and motivational pedagogical strategies, as well as to understand the differences in motivation and how they affect teaching and learning. Through a literature review of the development of second language instruction, classroom observations, and teacher interviews, this study reveals the interplay of education and culture. One classroom from each country was observed four times.

While no "correct" classroom exists, certain factors appeared to positively influence language learners' experiences. Each classroom demonstrated culturally-influenced factors such as technology in Texas and cultural exposure in Argentina. While ideally Texas would increase the mandatory years of instruction, this study pragmatically suggests that Texas teachers should explain the importance of L2 acquisition to students and enhance student motivation by using technology to provide cultural exposure.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While the final write-up is mine, this paper never would have reached fruition without a myriad of support and guidance from people all over the globe. As with all accomplishments, I first give thanks to God for the graces of intellect, motivation and energy to get through this project.

Second, I thank my wonderful advisor and boss, Dr. Valerie Balester, who always succeeded in constructing her feedback so that I left her office feeling motivated. Thanks to my parents for their support—especially my mom, who patiently listened to me last spring break as I brainstormed ideas and then throughout this semester encouraged me to write, write, WRITE.

A grateful gracias to all the teachers and administrators in Buenos Aires and Texas who let me observe their classrooms and interview them. It is an intrusive process, and I appreciate their willingness to help. I am especially grateful for the Buenos Aires teachers who welcomed me, the foreigner who needed observations and interviews in a very short time frame. A big thanks to Paz, who embraced me as a friend and fellow educator from our first meeting, and my high school teacher, Sra. Wilson. Without Sra.'s enthusiastic teaching, I might never have discovered my love of languages.

Finally, to all the friends who supported me through prayers and by just being my friend, thank you. I could not have done it without you.

NOMENCLATURE

BA	Buenos Aires
CS	College Station
L1	First, or Native, Language
L2	Second Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TEKS	Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
NOMENCLATURE.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
LIST OF TABLES	xi
 CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION	1
Economic and political reasons for bilingualism	2
Cognitive and cultural benefits	4
Lending and borrowing	5
Universal language	6
Objective	8
II METHODS.....	10
Language acquisition theories	10
Methodology	24
III RESULTS.....	31
School structures	31
Observations and interviews	43
IV CONCLUSIONS.....	71
Strengths.....	72
Areas for improvement.....	72
Final suggestions	75

	Page
REFERENCES	77
APPENDIX	83
CONTACT INFORMATION	86

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	Page
1 Implicit teacher feedback	18
2 Explicit teacher feedback	19
3 Example data coding	28
4 CIA map of Argentina.....	33
5 Buenos Aires five category description of English instruction for Level 2 learners in 4 th -6 th grade.....	37
6 Buenos Aires in-depth description of English instruction for Level 2 learners in 4 th -6 th grade	38
7 Buenos Aires reflection description of English instruction for Level 2 learners in 4 th -6 th grade, including metalinguistic, metacognitive, and intercultural.....	38
8 Texas physical geography map	41
9 Rubric for Texas teacher self-assessment in relation to TEKS	43
10 TEKS outline of content that should be covered at Levels I and II in Texas.....	43
11 Classroom time: L1 example.....	56
12 Coping potential	64
13 Elementary classroom	66
14 Goal or need significance classroom example	69

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
1 Information about teachers interviewed.....	29
2 School structure results	46
3 Classroom exercises results.....	48
4 Teacher habits results	54
5 L1/Cultural influence results	58
6 Other influences results	59
7 Motivational influence results	61

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language not only reveals how other societies think and feel, what they have experienced and value, and how they express themselves, it also provides a cultural mirror in which we can more clearly see out own society.

-- Chancellor Edward Lee Gorsuch

The *Economist* predicts that the Hispanic population count will be not just significantly higher in the 2010 census, but also higher than the black count (2010). In 2000, 12.5% of the population was Hispanic. The *Economist* predicts it will now be around 16%. "This population has grown twice as fast over the past decade" as other ethnic groups (2010), and in general we have the highest percentage of foreign-born population since 1930. This growth has become apparent in schools, as half of all teachers will come into contact with English-language learners (Reid, 2002, p. 95). With this influx of different cultures and languages, it is important to remember that the U.S. does not have an official language. Several states have adopted English as theirs, but the U.S. remains open, although English is obviously the de facto language.

This thesis follows the style of *Cambridge Journal of Second Language Studies*.

Our country's history reveals openness to more than the English language in the 19th century. The U.S. never adopted an official language, and some states even went so far as to state that literacy in either Spanish or English should be the goal.

However, by the end of the century, due in large measure to xenophobia caused by influxes of immigrants, educators and politicians decided to define Americans "as a distinct culture," separate from the new cultures (Reid, 2002, p. 96). This, along with the rise of the U.S. as a world power, led to the de facto use of English that still exists.

Economic and political reasons for bilingualism

Communicating with different cultures is more than a formality; it is a form of survival—politically and economically. Two-thirds of the world's children are raised as bilingual speakers, according to a 2001 estimate from the World Watch Institute (Sampat, 2001). The United States lags behind, with only 6.3 percent of the population bilingual. Bilingual, as defined by Merriam-Webster, means "able to use two languages especially with equal fluency" (Merriam-Webster Online, 2009). Historically, the United States has been a world superpower and has been able to use English as the dominant language. People in the United States who do not speak English as their first language are sometimes considered less "American" and unwelcome. The people of the United States are currently experiencing a paradigm shift, however, as it has become apparent that the presence of native Spanish speakers, especially in southern states and big cities around the U.S., is increasing and affecting our day-to-day activities.

Looking beyond Spanish, when the terrorist attacks of September 11th occurred, there were about seventy Arabic speakers in the FBI. Few were even able to interact fluently with native Arabic speakers (Eggen, 2006). Since 2001, many critical language study abroad programs and scholarships have been developed nationally to encourage the pursuit of studies in Chinese, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, and other languages of the Middle East and South Asia. While I do not negate the importance of understanding these languages, where is the same push to effectively acquire skills for a language that is one of the most spoken in the world and can serve us in the United States—especially around our fragile borders?

Ideally, a sense of global respect would motivate people to learn a new language, but the economics of the matter in a capitalistic society guarantee motivation. From many viewpoints, Spanish speakers are a booming, and therefore, mandatory market. With this mindset of growth comes the realization that Spanish language acquisition is more than an off-hand high school elective – it is a competitive skill that is sought after and rewarded in the professional workforce. Job applications include “check here” boxes for bilingual Spanish speakers, and bonuses are offered to teachers who can instruct in both languages; this trend is just beginning.

While the United States may be just awakening to the importance of acquiring a second language, the rest of the world has long been motivated by similar desires to compete on the English business level. Countries are also expanding beyond English. The British

school system has vowed to have second language instruction at all primary levels by 2010 (Andalo, 2007). This and other similar examples bring to light the poor emphasis second language instruction receives in the United States. At such a critical time in this internationalized world, what can we, as the United States, learn from other countries' initiatives in second language instruction? What does our system have to offer English language classrooms in other countries?

Cognitive and cultural benefits

Effectively learning an L2 allows the user to develop in many ways. While the community benefits, i.e. politically and economically, have been discussed, it is important to understand the cognitive and cultural benefits as well.

The cognitive benefits associated with learning a L2 are still being fully discovered. Aside from the obvious fact that L2 users have mastered two language structures and two sets of vocabulary, scientists have been able to examine the cognitive effects. Some research shows bilingual children scoring higher in problem solving questions. Bilingual children also “seem to have better metalinguistic awareness,” which means they better understand how languages are used (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 346). A recent study showed that bilinguals were able to process certain words faster and that bilingual children solved problems with misleading cues more easily (Wenner, 2010). These, and many other studies, contribute to the growing understanding of just how much L2 acquisition positively affects the human brain.

Apart from the neurological processes, cultural learning intertwines with L2 education. Margaret Mead defined education as “the cultural process, the way in which each newborn human infant, born with a potentiality for learning greater than that of any other mammal, is transformed into a full member of a specific human society, sharing with the other members a specific human culture” (Masemann, 2007, p. 102). Language is more than communication; it is intricately tied within a people's culture and self-identity. In *Didáctica*, an Argentine teacher support manual, an example is given of the Acadians, who defeated the Sumerians, but adopted their language in acknowledgement of the cultural value (Dorronzoro & Klett, 2005, p. 55). The value placed on languages is not ill-deserved. By learning another language, a person is learning about the social constructs, the values, the geography and the history. Learners expand their worldviews beyond themselves and sometimes challenge their beliefs. For high school students, L2 instruction can give them the first glimpse of a world outside their community.

L2 acquisition provides intellectual, cultural, political, and economic benefits that will continue throughout a lifetime. With the value established, the question becomes, how can the information be effectively transmitted to engage and teach students?

Lending and borrowing

Using practices from other cultures has been coined as “lending” and “borrowing” (Arnove, 2007, p. 5). The terms are simple, but a holistic analysis must be undertaken

for the implementation to be effective in language instruction. While not all techniques taken from one country would be appropriate or effective to transplant into another one, it would be beneficial to compare the different systems. Is there more of a focus on oral or written language? What are the leading second language ideas theories used by teachers? What cultural topics are presented in the classroom?

An example of lending and borrowing is seen in the Japanese and United States education systems. The Japanese have attempted to incorporate more of the American emphasis on the personal well-being of the students. The U.S. saw strength in the Japanese system of more days in the school year. And yet, as Arnove so eloquently states, what good does extra school time bring if the quality of the education is not improved (2007, p. 5)? Writing provides another example, as it is culturally determined. Robert Kaplan found different styles that represent different cultures. For example, in English, we value concise, direct writing, while in Asian languages, a circular, vague style is preferred (Kaplan, 2001). These different styles cannot just be transplanted across cultures effectively. While it is a good start to recognize differences in school systems, the tactics cannot be uprooted from one culture and expected to thrive in another without a careful examination of motives and cultural relevance.

Universal language

During research, I discovered an interesting language, Esperanto, which was created to combine languages and create a universal one. Dr. Esperanto himself, in his introductory

book, argues for the language, stating "all translation would be made into it alone, as into a tongue intelligible to all, and works of an international character would be written in it in the first instance" (Zamenhof, 1887). While it sounds wonderful on paper, I perceive two problems. First, a simple and basic language will be unable to accurately convey the intricacies of a language that has been developing for hundreds of years. Second, recognizing how closely language is intertwined with culture, which country would be willing to acquiesce whatever hold their language has on the world for a "neutral" language? It is doubtful we would find one.

While I am unwilling to consider the possibility of this breeding into an accepted international language, Dr. Esperanto's goals for the language provide insight for all language enthusiasts. His primary concerns were:

- 1) To render the study of the language so easy as to make its acquisition mere play to the learner.
- 2) To enable the learner to make direct use of his knowledge with persons of any nationality, whether the language be universally accepted or not; in other words, the language is to be directly a means of international communication.
- 3) To find some means of overcoming the natural indifference of mankind, and disposing them, in the quickest manner possible, and *en masse*, to learn and use the proposed language as a living one, and not only in last extremities, and with the key at hand (Zamenhof, 1887).

These same goals underlie the purpose of this study. How are teachers making second language learning easy, how are students being taught to apply the language, and how are students being motivated to achieve these goals?

Objective

With this in mind, several questions arise. Are current high school students aware of the necessity and advantages of acquiring a working knowledge of the Spanish language?

We have motivation – in the form of the one in five families in the southern states who speak Spanish at home (Lowe, 2008). For their safety, and our economy, it is necessary that we are prepared to communicate with them. An international world is no longer an option; we are living it. The question then becomes, with clear motivation present, how do we explain it when high school students graduate and are barely able to communicate Spanish?

This thesis reports on a comparative analysis of high school second language classrooms in Texas and Argentina. It explains the different theoretical strategies present in the classroom. I proposed that Spanish classes in Texas are less effective primarily because they are not viewed by students as critical to success in the professional world. I then proposed ways in which Texas Spanish language classrooms can be strengthened to realistically prepare students for an international world in the United States.

Throughout this discussion, the native language, or *lengua maternal*, will be referred to as L1 (English denotation) or LM (Spanish denotation). The second language, or L2, is known as the LE, *lengua extranjera*, in Spanish (Dorronzoro & Klett, 2005, p. 51).

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Nothing, no doubt, would be more interesting than to know from historical documents the exact process by which the first man began to lisp his first words, and thus to be rid forever of all the theories on the origin of speech.

-- M. Muller, 1871

Language acquisition theories

Linguists have yet to uncover a completely accurate model of how language acquisition occurs; it remains just out of grasp as an elusive goal. However, there are generally accepted theories that describe the basic concepts behind language acquisition. While the focus of this paper is L2, it is prudent to understand language acquisition in general.

L1 acquisition

We currently know that there are many similarities between languages, including that all are complex and can form an infinite set of sentences, that anyone with normal brain capabilities is capable of acquiring a language, and that language is always a part of the human race (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 28).

Most discussions begin with universal grammar, which argues that some knowledge of language is already “built in” every human brain (White, 1989, p. 3; Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 17). Another term associated with this theory is “poverty of the stimulus,”

which highlights children's ability to produce more language than they are exposed to, suggesting an innate ability. Some contradictory information is degeneracy, which states that children learning a language do not always hear it correctly, and negative evidence, which asks how children learn about ungrammaticality (White, 1989). However, it remains true that everyone with normal brain functions can acquire a language, so something in the brain allows this to occur. In the 1950s, linguists shifted their focus to people's behaviors. The idea of imitation was largely examined, but it failed to explain when children produce unique sentences (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 57; Lightbown & Spada, 2002). The important rule with L1 acquisition is that it is acquired naturally. Most people do not know the rules governing their L1 language structure.

L2 acquisition

The same often does not hold true for L2 acquisition, unless the speaker was raised bilingually with both languages from early childhood. Many different theories also surround L2 acquisition because no one completely understands a direct process. A key difference is that the L1 has already been learned. Interlanguage refers to a L2 system that is being developed and affected by the L1. "Linguistic relativism" states that since different languages encode differently, speakers think about the world in different ways (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 17). The common example given is that one Alaskan language has many different words for "snow." While they can understand differences between the words because snow is a prominent feature in their world, we just see snow. In learning their language, one would have to learn to distinguish the different ways to see

snow. This shows that language acquisition is not a word-for-word process but requires more abstraction.

Biological factors

When discussing second language acquisition, the Monitor Theory is similar to the idea of Universal Grammar, but it has been modified to specifically address L2 acquisition. Two terms posited by the Monitor Theory are necessary to understand acquisition and learning. With “acquisition,” L2 language acquisition is occurring in a similar fashion to the L1 experience, i.e. the focus is on the communication of meaning. On the other hand, “learning” requires a conscious process and puts the focus on rules and structure. If a person is truly raised bilingually from childhood, they can “acquire both L1 and L2” (Lightbown & Spada, 2002, p. 117). However, for most people learning in elementary or high school, the language requires the “learning” process.

Even if the L2 must be learned by rules, the L1 still has an effect even beyond the idea of interlanguage. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis posits that similarities between L1 and L2 languages would pose no problems for the learner but that differences would cause problems. While logical, L2 language learner tests revealed random errors and successes in areas where errors were predicted. Current research indicates that L1 influence changes as L2 competence increases (Lightbown & Spada, 2002). This is supported by the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis, which posits that L2 learners use different tools than L1 learners. Specifically, they do not use language acquisition tools,

but rather problem-solving skills, similar to what one might use to learn math (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 348).

Researchers have noticed that L2 learning errors tend to reflect a systematic, not random, knowledge (Lightbown & Spada, 2002, p. 123). Researchers have even been able to develop “stages” of linguistic formation. For example, when learning to ask questions, four stages have been ascertained for L2 English learners: single words (She?), declarative word order (She your mom?), fronting (Who your mom is?), inversion (Who is your mom?), and complex (You like it more, don’t you?) (Lightbown & Spada, 2002, p. 125). This structure proves that learning occurs in a systematic fashion.

When comparing English and Spanish, the two languages use the same parts of speech (noun, subject, verb, etc), but they vary in syntax. In Spanish, the personal pronoun is an optional part of speech; in English, it is not. In Spanish, the direct and indirect objects sometimes come before the verb. These and other little differences cause problems for L2 learners of both languages. Pronunciation in English is also an issue, as the English language is irregular and rarely pronounced as it is written.

Age factors

As innate as language learning may be, excellent acquisition of a language becomes more difficult with age. A child at 7 months can distinguish between more sounds than it can at 11 months (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 323). This tells us that as people age, they rapidly lose language capacities. While a little disheartening, it makes sense that we have to neutralize sounds as we acquire language competency. Otherwise, we would be constantly overwhelmed and unable to make sense of input.

The Critical Period Hypothesis poses that children are only able to acquire a "native-like" proficiency of a language before puberty (Bangaerts et al., 1995, p. 31; Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 53). This is posited from a biological standpoint because after puberty certain changes, such as the loss of cerebral plasticity, impede the language process. Some linguists cite a "sensitive period," during which time native language acquisition can be obtained. Phonology has the shortest time frame, while syntax might be larger (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 350).

Although people have varied results about whether a language can be efficiently and effectively learned after puberty, most agree that the accent is the most difficult to acquire after puberty. In a classroom setting, however, older students could acquire a second language faster because they may be more efficient and motivated. While the debate reigns, it is possible for high school students to effectively acquire an L2. Ideally, because of the age factor, the instruction should begin at an earlier age.

However, even starting earlier does not guarantee effective acquisition if time is not considered. Younger students may have the aptitude, but little progress will be made without constant exposure to the L2. If time is limited, then older students may progress more quickly due to their motivation or ability to stay on task (Cohen & Dornyei, 2002, p. 171).

Classroom factors

In teaching, age and time are just two of many factors that are outside of the teacher's control. We also have to consider student backgrounds, classroom size, resources available, parental support, etc. There is no ideal method that works in every situation. Teachers themselves tend to mix and match practices until they find what works.

However, with a “native or near-native speaker teacher, motivated student, and appropriate teaching materials,” most methods can succeed (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 351).

Success is considered producing students who can independently use the information through active knowledge, which is shown when students can use structures to create sentences and speak. Passive knowledge occurs when students can recognize structures but are unable to produce them independently (Ellis et al., 2009, p. 3). Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are all classroom activities that teachers must incorporate. Reading and listening can produce more passive knowledge, while speaking and writing

require the student's creation of information. Using natural sources for these exercises can increase student's abilities with the language, as well as their cultural exposure.

Teaching factors

Teaching styles hope to produce L2 speakers with active knowledge. Within the field of L2 theories, one method has more success with active knowledge than the other.

Learning, which could also be called the bottom-up method, emphasizes the structure and rules of the language. This method uses rote grammar drills involving translation, copying teacher dictations, and finding vocabulary in readings. This method was the favored practice until the mid-60's (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 351). The target language is minimally articulated, as the students rarely speak and the teacher tends to speak in the native language. It creates a large base of passive information, as the student interacts with some parts of the language but is unable to construct unique thoughts.

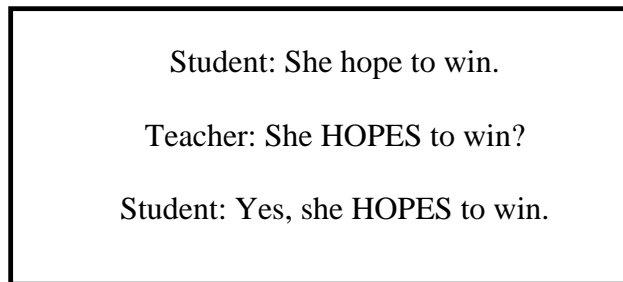
With acquisition, or the top-down method, the goal is to assimilate oneself within the language. Also known as the analytic approach, this method more closely resembles how native speakers acquire their language (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 351). Current textbooks will structure chapters on themes, such as transportation or clothing. From this, they will include dialogues and exercises that incorporate these themes. Grammar is taught less frequently and serves more as a guide when needed. Classroom material might be taken from real sources, as opposed to carefully crafted for a specific objective. Rosetta Stone, a popular language-learning program that the government uses, teaches its material with

the acquisition model. With the push for practical information that is useful in a real-world setting, these classroom methods are more popular.

With the adoption of this perspective, there has simultaneously been a shift in the focus from the teachers to the students. The idea of "natural development" has become more prominent, which is again focusing on analytical or top-down methods and changes the direction from rote-memorization grammar exercises to contextual exercises that engage students through writing, listening, speaking, and reading (Masemann, 2007, p. 104). The exercises focus not on presenting the information in the easiest way, but rather on the teacher encouraging the involvement of the students and modifying the exercises to best assist their learning.

While grammar is being emphasized less, it should not be completely dismissed. Grammar gives structure to an L2; it provides the student with security (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 14). Since the students do not have instinctual knowledge to rely upon, are the rules necessary to guide the construction of the language? To some extent, the rules are definitely necessary and a part of even the modern textbooks, such as Longman's *Energy*, which was both observed in classrooms. As the trend towards acquisition continues, it will become necessary to decide if grammar should remain a separate construct, or if it can be adequately taught within the context of reading, writing, listening, or speaking (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 6).

Corrective feedback is another aspect of teaching that is impacted by an acquisition or learning style. As shown in Figure 1, implicit feedback “recasts” the sentence.



Student: She hope to win.

Teacher: She HOPES to win?

Student: Yes, she HOPES to win.

Figure 1. Implicit teacher feedback.

The teacher provides the correct feedback, but without stating the rule. Explicit feedback involves stating the rule to show why the student was incorrect, as shown in Figure 2. In this instance, the teacher provides the student with the rule, and the student has to make the change. The study found in “Implicit and Explicit Knowledge...” indicates that explicit feedback was more effective than implicit (Ellis et al., 2009, p. 330). This is an important classroom technique that teachers should consider.

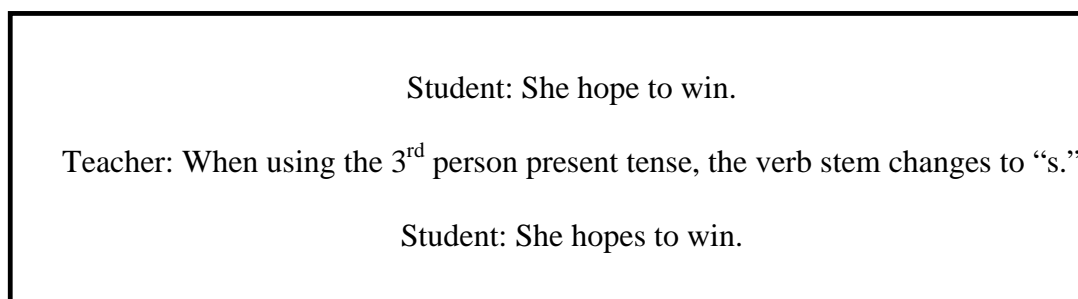


Figure 2: Explicit teacher feedback.

Developing resources

As L2 acquisition rises in prominence, people continue to seek new ways to most effectively teach it. Two developing resources for language teachers can be found in the areas of drama and corporas. While drama exercises are useful for in-class activities, corporas can provide the teachers with current information to apply to the classroom.

Drama

Drama-based instruction allows L2 classrooms to develop speaking and leadership skills along with language skills. These exercises, which might involve impromptu dialogues or rehearsing a scene, build confidence with written and spoken dialogue. Pragmatically, the teacher should avoid selections that require a specialized vocabulary or use antiquated words, like Shakespeare (McRae, 1985, p. 19). If the correct source material is used, these exercises can be engaging and stimulating. Traits that can be emphasized during these exercises are “linguistic reinforcement, thematic presentation, leading to discussion... pronunciation, concatenation, intonation practice ... language practice in

group, and of course introduction to drama as expressive genre” (McRae, 1985, p. 15).

The teacher is able to engage the students in small group speaking exercises that allow for increased speaking time in a more relaxed environment (as opposed to one student speaking in front of the entire class). If used correctly, this exercise can stimulate student interest as well.

Corporas

A burgeoning new tool in language classrooms is the language corpora. By compiling hundreds and thousands of real conversations into online databases, linguists are able to analyze naturally-occurring language. Each corpus has a range of criteria, which can include the medium of the language (e.g. written or spoken), the language, and the setting (e.g. academic classroom, political event, etc.). Concordancing is one of the most useful features of a corpora; it allows the user to find every instance of a word or phrase in the database (O’Keeffe et al., 2007). Some textbook companies use language information from the corporas to establish the most effective and current language teaching material in the textbooks.

Unfortunately, few teachers utilize corpora in their classroom, and it is not yet recognized for its full potential (Aijmener, 2009). Corporas can serve as resources for teachers and students alike. Teachers can reference concordances to find extra in-context information about certain words or phrases. Another example use of corpora is to find all words that are over- or under-used by learners. This provides immediate knowledge

about where vocabulary expansion might be needed (Granger, 2009). Especially for teachers who are teaching their L2, this feature can supplement their textbook knowledge. If teachers were to make corporas from their classroom interactions, they would be able to self-assess their own teaching style by analyzing elements such as teacher questioning strategies, response-wait time, and recurring feedback (O’Keeffe et al., 2007).

As a developing field, most researchers acknowledge that analysis is needed to increase the usability of corporas for teachers and students (O’Keefe, 2007; Aijmener, 2009). It is critical, however, for teachers to stay abreast of the new developments and employ them to best serve their students.

Student motivation

While the teacher’s plan affects a large part of the classroom, student motivation also determines the effectiveness of the class. Motivation affects classroom management and classroom success. In a language classroom that capitalizes on participation, student motivation is a vital component. Without it, progress can be negligible or even non-existent.

Motivation

Motivation must first be generated, then maintained, then reflected upon, according to Dornyei’s model (Cohen & Dornyei, 2002, p. 172). In a classroom, this could involve

getting students to engage with material or participate in an exercise, then having them complete the exercise or homework or test, and then allowing them to reflect on the feedback in the form of verbal interaction with the teacher or a grade.

Various factors might generate the motivation, including “integrative,” which shows a desire to interact with and integrate into the community, “instrumental,” which highlights the realistic benefits, such as a better job, and “integrative,” which combines the different motivation types. Teachers can boost motivation through their interactions with students and the feedback they give. “Autonomy-supporting” teachers, as opposed to controlling ones, have been shown to increase “student involvement and commitment” (Cohen & Dornyei, 2002, p. 175). These are the teachers who encourage students to take ownership of the material and help them to realize why it benefits them.

As mentioned earlier, learning a new language also involves learning about a new culture. When teachers are able to integrate these two goals and spark student motivation about the language and the culture, great progress can be made.

Schumann’s model

John Schumann, a professor in the Department of Applied Linguistics & TESL at the University of California, proposed a motivational model with a foundation in neurobiology. He compared student intrinsic motivation to the process of how animals

forage for food (Schumann, 2001). He used five categories to identify how student's motivation is determined (Cohen & Dornyei, 2002, p. 174). His model involves

- Pleasantness - degree of positive appeal
- Coping potential - self-confidence about handling the material
- Novelty – level of unexpectedness/familiarity
- Self and social image - degree it fits with social norms and individual's views
- Goal or need significance - degree it fits into personal goals or needs.

While all these factors contribute to student motivation, it is also highly affected by linguistic self-confidence. Schmitt went so far as to posit that language abilities are not the determining factor, but rather student confidence (174). Age is also a factor, as younger students are less concerned about making mistakes when speaking in front of peers.

Of the five motivational characteristics described, pleasantness and coping potential are two that are highly influenced by the teacher. Pleasantness, or the degree of positive appeal, can be increased by the teacher's selection of engaging activities and use of interactive feedback. Failure to do this could lead to students associating the L2 experience with a lack of pleasantness. Coping potential, or the student's self-confidence towards the material, can be affected by the teacher's feedback. If the teacher makes the student feel stupid or insecure, then they will be less likely to participate and improve.

Novelty, or the level of unexpectedness or familiarity, is highly dependent on the amount of exposure the students have had to the language. This could work either way, as students who are too familiar with the language could be very bored, but students who have had no contact might not be able to relate at all. Self and social image is a similar characteristic, as society and peers' views of the L2 can influence the students' motivation to acquire it.

Goal or need significance reveals whether the L2 acquisition actually fits into the students' goals. If it does, then they have personal motivation to succeed in the classroom. If it does not, then motivation can be more difficult.

While the holistic experience requires an analysis of classroom environment, teaching strategies, and the students' attitudes, success or failure is determined by the students' attitudes, and all other factors should be geared towards achieving student motivation.

L2 acquisition is still a developing field. As global interdependence increases, everyone wants to discover the most efficient way to learn another language. With these theories in mind, we can move on to how high school L2 acquisition was actually evaluated for this thesis.

Methodology

A current perspective was critical to the success of this research, as I was examining a paradigm shift in American attitudes towards second languages at the high school level.

High school was chosen because that is the age when many Texas students begin learning an L2. Texas was chosen because of my background with Texas high school language classrooms. I grew up in Mexia, Texas and took Spanish classes from 8th-12th grade. Argentina was chosen because it is one of the most developed countries in South America. Educational statistics are on par with countries internationally, making its educational system competitive with the United States (Arnové et al., 2007, p. 280). However, this is only true for the private schools in Buenos Aires. The public school system, especially outside of Buenos Aires, is not comparable, as I learned through multiple in-country interviews.

Research was conducted with the intent of answering:

- The theory behind second language instruction
- The differences/similarities between Texas/Argentinean systems
- Current teacher/student perceptions of second languages

Questions to be answered included, what makes a second language class effective? How are different teaching strategies affected by the external culture? What can the two cultures learn from each other? What steps could be taken to strengthen the path towards bilingualism in the United States, specifically Texas?

Observations and interviews

The observation research was conducted in high school second language classrooms in Buenos Aires and Texas. Classroom observations involved detailed notes on the environment of the classes, the attitudes of the students and teacher, and the techniques used to teach the second language in each country.

I spent twelve weeks in Buenos Aires last summer and was trained as an English Second Language teacher, received my Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certification, and taught English. While I originally allocated six weeks for classroom observations, the swine flu caused the schools to close for a month, and observation time was cut to two weeks. However, during this time, I was able to observe in nine classes that ranged from elementary school to high school. I observed one high school classroom four times. The non-high school classrooms supplemented my knowledge of the L2 learning process in Buenos Aires, since they typically begin L2 instruction at much younger levels.

I interviewed all the teachers of the classrooms I observed, as well as several administrators, including two Doctoras from the National Ministry of Education. I compared this information to my observations.

I observed six Spanish language classes (two separate classrooms) in a public school in College Station, Texas. I interviewed the teachers of those classrooms, as well as a

teacher in a different school district in Graham, Texas. This teacher was my high school Spanish teacher for 3 years.

By comparing the theories, observations, and interviews, I was able to use triangulation to locate the differences between theory and practice of L2 instruction and the differences between the two cultures.

Motivation model

To analyze student motivation, I used Schumann's model. By classifying student experiences into these six categories, I was able to compare the students' motivation in the classrooms of Buenos Aires and Argentina.

Coding

To preserve anonymity, teachers were assigned letters. Argentine teachers have double letters, i.e. "AA," and Texas teachers have one letter, i.e. "J." The teacher information is shown in Table 1. Classroom observations and teacher interviews were color coded into six categories to analyze the data. The categories were determined by observed trends in the data. The categories are as follows:

- School Structure (purple)
- Classroom Exercises (yellow)
- Teacher Habits (green)
- L1/Cultural Influence (grey)
- Other Influences (dark blue)

- Motivational Influence (light blue)

School structure refers to information that explains how the school is structured; this was primarily taken from interviews. Classroom exercises refers to the actual activities that took place during class. Teacher habits involved the way that teachers interacted with students. Other influences involved other cultures' influences, via resources and perceptions, in the L2 process. L1/Cultural Influence highlighted how the student's L1 and culture affected their L2 acquisition. Motivational Influence looked at student motivation through the lenses of the Schumann model. An example coding from a classroom in Buenos Aires is shown in Figure 3.

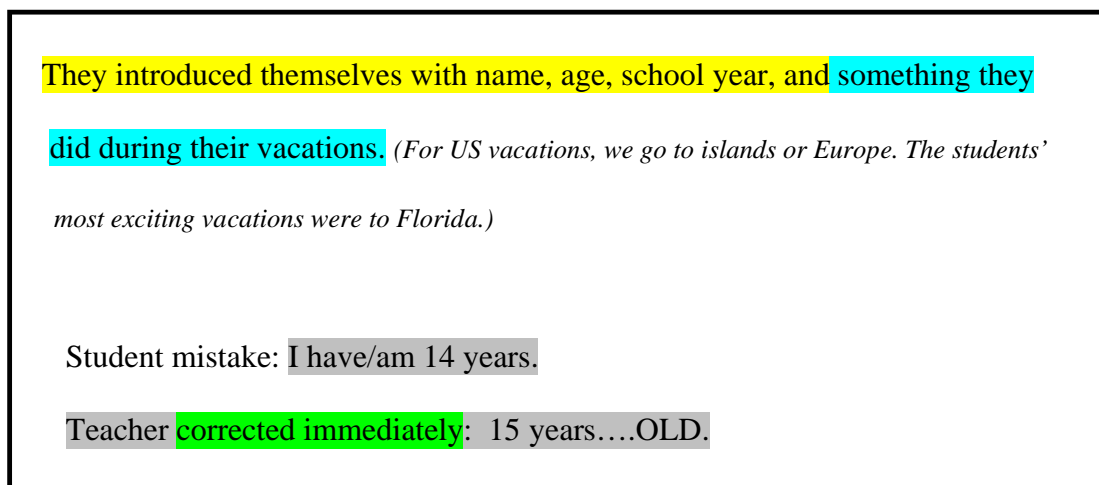


Figure 3: Example data coding.

Table 1. Information about teachers interviewed

Teacher	Currently Teaches?	Language	Level	Classes Observed
Argentina				
AA	Yes	English	HS freshmen	3
BB	Yes	English	HS sophomores	1
CC	Yes	English	HS	2
DD	Yes	English	elementary/middle	1
EE	Yes	English	HS freshmen	1
FF	No; taught in the 70s	English	HS freshmen	1
Doctoras	No; National Ministry of Education employees	N/A	N/A	N/A
Texas				
H	Yes	Spanish	HS freshmen and sophomores	4
J	Yes	Spanish	HS sophomores and juniors	2
K	Yes	Spanish	HS	0

Limitations to research methodology

As most researchers agree, there is no one “perfect” study environment within education research. Many factors can affect feasibility and appropriateness. My objective was to observe the daily classroom activities and habits of L2 classrooms. I wanted to observe activities the teacher used, as well as speech habits of the students and teachers. Since I was present in the classroom for such a short period of time, there is little quantitative analysis. The majority of my observations are qualitative. A case study was also not feasible due to my restricted time in Argentina. Recording observations by hand meant that I did not record everything. However, I was able to use shorthand to capture the majority of the classroom activities.

I was unable to gain direct access to the students in Buenos Aires for interviews. My teacher interviews took place in English and in Spanish. While I understood English better, I know the teachers were unable to express themselves as clearly as they might have otherwise. The same holds true for my understanding of their comments in Spanish. Also, sometimes I had to give them example responses to clarify the purpose of the question. This could have led to elicitation, where their particular response was affected by my example. The interviews were semi-structured, as I had a set list of questions (see Appendix). However, if a response caught my attention, I would pursue the question more specifically.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

El que habla dos lenguas vale por dos.

(The person who speaks two languages is worth two people.)

-- Spanish saying

School structures

Through interviews and observations, I was able to construct a model of the current school systems in Buenos Aires and Texas that brings into account historical and national perspectives. These findings provide a contextual foundation to understand the classroom results.

Buenos Aires

Science is one of the driving forces of the economy and global relations. Since English is the primary language of science, countries must be able to employ this language in order to be competitive globally. However, this drive towards English can occur at the expense of the native language. Latin America, in total, represents less than 3 percent of the scientific economy (Schugurensky, 2007, p. 263). This puts the continent at a higher risk of suppressing their culture in the pursuit of the idealized global economy.

Luckily for Argentina, specifically Buenos Aires, the percentage of students in urban areas that attend school is, on average, above 90 percent. As students reach high school,

the percentage drops from high nineties to low, but it still remains the highest percentage for urban areas in South America. The rural percentage is not available (Arnove et al., 2007, p. 280). The high level today is in large part due to the rule of the Perons in the mid-20th century. Mass education became a “mechanism of social control...developing social solidarity and national identity” (Samoff, 2007, p. 50). In 1947, when the Perons were in power, they used school as a breeding ground to inculcate socialism. President Peron viewed school as the "first step" to achieve his goals of development and national pride (Rein, 1998, p. 33). Everything, from school assemblies to textbooks, was remodeled in the spirit of socialism. In 1948, a separate Education Ministry was created, further emphasizing the importance of education. Literacy also increased significantly during the twentieth century. Around ninety percent of the population was illiterate at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and a partial survey in 1943 showed illiteracy at only 15 percent (Rein, 1998, p. 40). As Argentina has restructured its educational systems, the country is following the example of developed countries, such as the U.S., and setting the path for less-developed countries.

Geography

Understanding Argentina’s geography helps to understand Argentina’s educational progress. Figure 4 presents the CIA map of Argentina (2010), which highlights its long span. The majority of the country is rural farmland that is predominately used for cows. The North is bordered by Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil, which heightens the importance of Portuguese in the North. Uruguay is a neighboring country to the East. Buenos Aires,

the capital city of Argentina (similar to Washington, D.C.), is located in the northeast corner, near Uruguay. This city is the business hub for the entire country. The West is bordered by Chile and the Andes Mountains, and the South, referred to as Patagonia, holds sparse land only fit for sheep, but is also known for its mountains and glaciers. Through globalization and media, even "pockets of Argentina's Patagonia" have been reached, which shows that the country is progressing (Torres & Puiggros, 1997, p. 14).



Figure 4: CIA map of Argentina (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010).

Aside from a few key cities, Argentina is predominately rural, and thus still desires to expand the equality of its educational system. With the mentality that "eliminating poverty requires knowledge affluence" (Samoff, 2007, p. 61), becoming a competitive society requires eliminating poverty through education. With such a broad area to cover,

administrators will probably need to do more than just watch the “trickle-down” effect of educational progress across the country.

Attitude towards English

My observations reveal that Buenos Aires pursues this desire to increase knowledge affluence through its emphasis on learning English. Social reality, stemming from a structuralist viewpoint, suggests that reality is shaped by “people and the meanings they variously allocated to the world they inhabited” (Welch, 2007, p. 31). With this perspective, what is the social reality of Buenos Aires in regards to second language learning? From my observations, in Buenos Aires, English is touted as the supreme language. This is largely due to the American cultural infiltration in the form of popular music and film, as well as the idealized notion that everything is “perfect” and “rich” in the States. In Buenos Aires, English services are offered at major street corners via ads and people handing out flyers. This emphasis might even be considered a little extreme, but was affirmed by the teachers I interviewed, all of whom focused on the need for students to learn English. Acculturation, or “the process of cultural transfer from one group to another” (Masemann, 2007, p. 102), is occurring in Buenos Aires in the younger generation through strong American media influences. The high school students I observed listened to Hannah Montana and watched “The Suite Life of Zach and Cody.”

A problem has occurred while pursuing this U.S. ideal because the traditional relaxed culture of Argentina does not maximize the idea of achievement-based learning, which is

considered the necessary framework to achieve a capitalistic society (Welch, 2007, p. 25). Time is much more fluid in Argentina than in the U.S., and this often leads to digression and prolonging projects. Referencing the earlier discussion of lending and borrowing, this is a prime example of how cultural practices are negatively affecting the push towards achievement-based learning. It is important to keep this in mind when comparing this culture to the U.S., where being punctual is required.

City standards

Argentina is split into provinces, comparable to our states. The capital city, Buenos Aires, is actually an independent city, much like Washington, D.C. In 2001, the Buenos Aires Gobierno de la Ciudad, or Government of the City, produced a document that outlines L2 teaching and the content that should accompany each level of instruction (Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2001). This document includes a plan for French, English, Italian, and Portuguese. The document, entitled “Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras,” or Foreign Language Curriculum Design, divides L2 instruction into 4 categories (Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2001). It also further splits the categories into 4 groups that modify the content based on the grade level when students begin. The subgroups are from 1st-3rd grade, 4th-6th grade, 7-9th grade, and 10th-12th grade. This tailors the content to the intellectual and maturity level of the students. Before reaching the actual tables with the teaching guidelines, it spends 7 pages detailing the importance of L2. It then lists the benefits of learning to listen, write, read, and speak in another language.

On page 49, it finally begins to detail L2 instruction. The plan is divided into five categories, which are the same for all languages: everyday activities, the world of communication and technology, personal and social life, the world around us, and the world of imagination and creativity. With each level, it provides a detailed description of the content that falls into each category, including examples. At the end of each level, it provides metalinguistic reflection, metacognitive reflection, and intercultural reflection. Figures 5, 6, and 7 show screenshots of the online document that outlines Level 2 English for the 4th-6th grade (Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2001, p. 87, 88, 91).

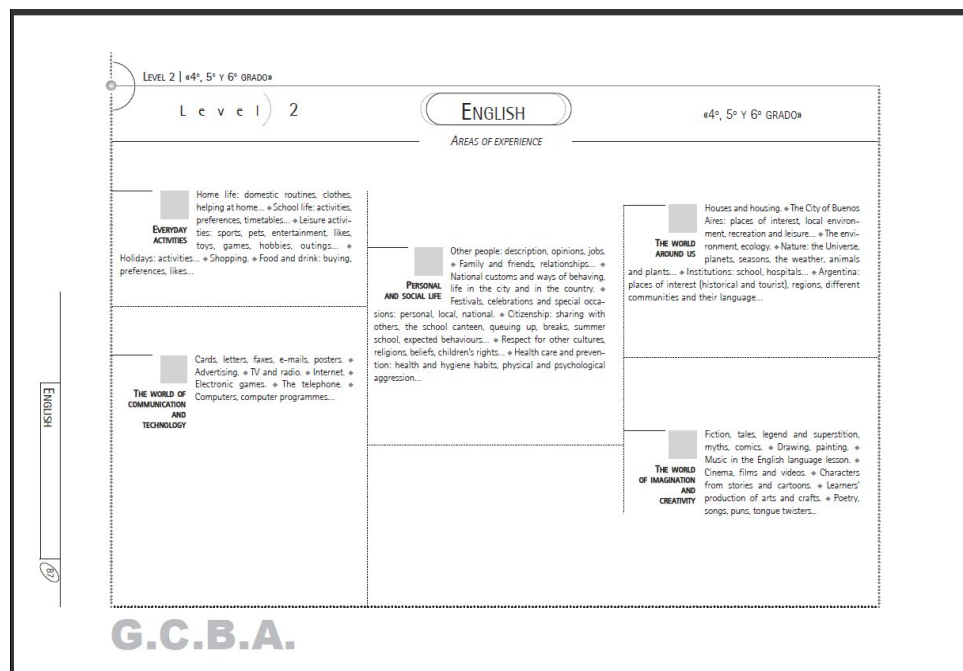


Figure 5: Buenos Aires five category description of English instruction for Level 2 learners in 4th-6th grade.

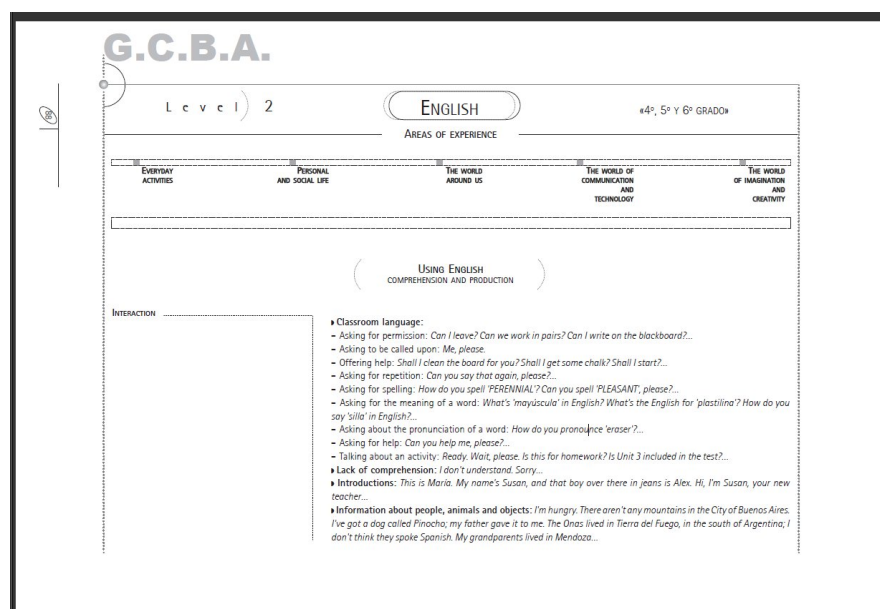


Figure 6: Buenos Aires in-depth description of English instruction for Level 2 learners in 4th-6th grade.

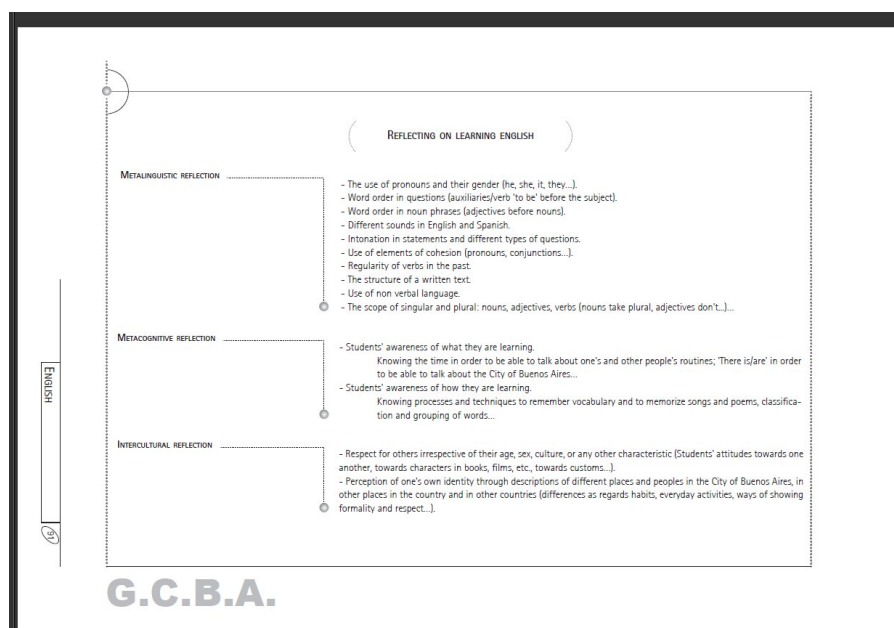


Figure 7: Buenos Aires reflection description of English instruction for Level 2 learners in 4th-6th grade, including metalinguistic, metacognitive, and intercultural.

Texas

Less is known about historical L2 instruction specifically in Texas, but a background understanding of L2 instruction in the U.S. is helpful. In 1983, several reports criticized the educational system of the United States, and multiple reforms have been attempted since then (Berman et al., 2007, p. 236). The main reason given for the needed reform was that the U.S. had economic problems that an improved educational system could help to alleviate. The final point was that schools needed to recognize "the realities of the new global marketplace" (Berman et al., 2007, p. 237). This was being stated in 1983, and it is now, more than ever, critical to assess where the U.S. stands in regards to economic stability and global competition.

In order to establish national L2 standards, a foreign language assessment is being developed. The goal is to test 12th grade students who have learned Spanish through their listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The assessment is predominately interested in knowing what the students can do with their acquired knowledge. A pilot test was given in 2003, but the subject will not be part of the national testing until at least 2018 (National Assessment Governing Board, 2000). This is a step in the direction of implementing standardized testing to establish a national level for language proficiency.

Geography

Texas is also a large state that has a diverse geography, as the Maps.com map shows in Figure 8 (Texas Physical Geography Map, 2007). The state began as a Mexican territory and has still retained a lot of Mexican influence. In recent years, with the influx of

immigrants, this influence has rapidly grown. Texas also has a large cattle industry, along with oil and energy. Many cities in Texas have access to excellent education at the public level. College Station's school ranking, on "greatschools.com" was 8 out of 10, which was based on their standardized testing scores.



Figure 8: Texas physical geography map.

Attitude towards Spanish

In the United States, the Spanish language and culture is not viewed as positively as Argentineans view English. The language has negative connotations, as it is often pictured with illegal immigrants and low-wage workers. There are many stereotypes and

misunderstandings associated with the negative viewpoints, and the process to rectifying these will be long. With the increase of the Hispanic population in the United States, exposure to the culture should rise, but thus far it has not yielded a positive effect.

State standards

In Texas, 1984 was the year of reform with House Bill 72, which worked to improve the acquisition of money for property-poor school districts. In 1995, Senate Bill 1 returned authority to local school districts, among other changes (Texas Education Agency, 2004). There has been minimal reform for L2 instruction.

In Texas, the Texas Educational Administration (TEA) exists to “to provide leadership, guidance, and resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students” (Texas Education Agency, 2004). They oversee everything from the standardized tests to the textbook adoption process. This includes setting the TEKS, or Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. In the TEA system, Spanish as an L2 falls under LOTE, or Languages Other Than English. In 1995, the TEA assigned a special group, known as Project ExCELL, to create TEKS for LOTE. These standards were developed with diverse input from language experts, a Curriculum Review Committee, experts from other subject areas, and community and business leaders. They reviewed the standards to ensure a diversity of thought, cross-curricular expectations, relevance to the professional world, and clarity. Based on their website explanation, the only perspective that appears

not to have been consulted is the international audience (LOTE Center of Educator Development, 2003a).

The LOTE curriculum has been divided into 5 categories: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. (LOTE Center for Education Development, 2006). The Communication division focuses on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The document for teachers lists sample practices that demonstrate necessary levels of comprehension. The teachers can self-assess themselves as GOOD (some of the time), BETTER (most of the time), and EXEMPLARY (almost all of the time). The Cultures division highlights the importance of understanding what people do, create, and perceive. The Connections division focuses on connecting the information to other subject areas. The Comparison division calls for an analysis of the student's culture in relation to the one being studied, which involves the differences in the language and the social habits. The Communities strand highlights the importance of using the language. This appears to be the most pragmatic goal, as it states "Learning languages other than English increases opportunities for participating in communities in Texas, in other states, and around the world. Students use languages to enhance their personal and public lives and to meet the career demands of the 21st century successfully" (LOTE Center for Educator Development, 2006, p. 22). Figures 9 and 10 show a screenshot of the teacher self-assessment form and the TEKS outline of content that should be covered at Levels I and II (LOTE Center for Educator Development, 2006, 1; Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, 2010).

LOTE Teacher Competencies for Professional Development: COMMUNICATION STRAND

Program Goal 1 – Communication
 Acquiring another language incorporates communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and showing. Students develop these communication skills by using knowledge of the language, including grammar, and culture, communication and learning strategies, technology, and content from other subject areas to socialize, to acquire and provide information, to express feelings and opinions, and to get others to adopt a course of action.

Knowledge and Skills: The student communicates in a language other than English using the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

CORE KNOWLEDGE	SAMPLE PRACTICES	YES	NO	UNCERTAIN
<p>The teacher knows the language.</p> <p>This page of the competencies is structured differently from the remainder of the document. Teachers are to signal whether or not they are of a certain proficiency level (Advanced, Advanced-High, or Superior) by choosing "yes", "no" or "uncertain". To be considered at a proficiency level, the language user must be able to sustain that performance all of the time; therefore, the scale of "good", "better", and "exemplary" does not apply in the same manner as for the other competencies.</p>	<p>The teacher of modern languages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> as a good practitioner, can use the language for instruction at the Advanced proficiency level in speaking. as a better practitioner, can use the language for instruction at the Advanced-High proficiency level in speaking. as an exemplary practitioner, can use the language for instruction at the Superior proficiency level in speaking. <p>For a complete description of proficiency levels, see the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Teachers can use the proficiency descriptions informally to determine their level of proficiency.</p> <p><i>Additional Sample Practices:</i></p> <p><i>NOTE: The teacher is encouraged to continue following the model above for self-assessment in writing, reading, and listening.</i></p>			

1

Figure 9: Rubric for Texas teacher self-assessment in relation to TEKS.

Ch. 114. TEKS for Languages Other Than English

<p>(2) Students of languages other than English gain the knowledge to understand cultural practices (what people do) and products (what people create) and to increase their understanding of other cultures as well as to interact with members of those cultures. Through the learning of languages other than English, students obtain the tools and develop the content needed to connect with other subject areas and to use the language to acquire information and reinforce other areas of study. Students of languages other than English develop an understanding of the nature of language, including grammar, and culture and use this knowledge to compare languages and cultures and to expand insight into their own language and culture. Students enhance their personal and public lives and meet the career demands of the 21st century by using languages other than English to participate in communities in Texas, in other states, and around the world.</p>	
<p>(6) Knowledge and skills:</p>	
<p>(1) Communication: The student communicates in a language other than English using the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.</p>	<p>The student is expected to:</p> <p>(A) engage in oral and written exchanges of learned material to socialize and to provide and obtain information.</p> <p>(B) demonstrate understanding of simple, clearly spoken, and written language such as simple stories, high-frequency commands, and brief instructions when dealing with familiar topics; and</p> <p>(C) present information using familiar words, phrases, and sentences to listeners and readers.</p>
<p>(2) Cultures: The student gains knowledge and understanding of other cultures.</p>	<p>The student is expected to:</p> <p>(A) demonstrate an understanding of the practices (what people do) and how they are related to the perspectives (how people perceive things) of the cultures studied; and</p> <p>(B) demonstrate an understanding of the products (what people create) and how they are related to the perspectives (how people perceive things) of the cultures studied.</p>
<p>(3) Connections: The student uses the language to make connections with other subject areas and to acquire information.</p>	<p>The student is expected to:</p> <p>(A) use resources (that may include technology) in the language and cultures being studied to gain access to information; and</p> <p>(B) use the language to obtain, reinforce, or expand knowledge of other subject areas.</p>

Page C-2

Texas Education Agency

Figure 10: TEKS outline of content that should be covered at Levels I and II in Texas.

As useful as this detailed curriculum can be, there is a disparity between what the State says and what actually happens. One of the Texas Guiding Principles is that “Acquiring languages other than English is essential for all students” (LOTE Center for Educator Development, 2003b). It further explains that L2 acquisition is for everyone, not just college-bound students, and that it benefits students and the community in multiple ways. A strong, positive statement, it is undermined when LOTE classrooms are deemed “enrichment curriculum” instead of “foundation curriculum.” While Texas is moving in the direction of serious language instruction, it still lacks the concrete requirements needed to propel the structure to a higher level.

Observations and interviews

I attempted to observe in high school classrooms throughout the Buenos Aires area. There is a marked difference between the quality of education at public and private schools, and for the purposes of a fair comparison between Texas and Buenos Aires, I only observed in private schools.

Teacher FF, who has run her own English teaching business for the past 20 years, was able to provide a historical perspective from teaching in a private school (to upper-class students) in Buenos Aires in 1975. The curriculum required English class for 45 minutes twice a week for 3 years. Her class sizes averaged around 42 students, which, in her view, essentially eliminated the ability to practice speaking skills. While she said that grammar was a focus, she really highlighted the importance of reading comprehension. Students were given booklets to equip them with basic tools to read in case they

matriculated to a university. She acknowledged that the school primarily valued reading, and not oral, skills. The students left the classes with a passive knowledge of the language, and she felt they could have only had a “very rudimentary conversation” in English that would allow them to survive. This focus on passive knowledge is similar to how language instruction used to be in the US as well.

While reviewing my classroom observations and interviews, I created basic categories that provided comparisons between the two countries: school structure, classroom exercises, teacher habits, other influences, L1/cultural influence, US/British influence, and motivational influence.

School structure

There were very obvious similarities and differences, as summarized in Table 2, for Argentina and Texas based on school structure. Both groups have language classrooms that are determined at the district/province level. They also both have city and state standards to guide the language instruction, which were discussed in the previous section.

Table 2: School structure results

Similarities:	Differences
Districts/Provinces in charge	Argentina: L2 required K-12
City/State standards	Texas: L2 required 2-3 years of high school

In Argentina, I had the opportunity to interview two Coordinators for Foreign Languages, or Doctoras, within the National Ministry of Education. They were just hired the previous month but were still able to provide background information about the school structure in Argentina. Argentina is split into 24 provinces, each of which has its own Ministry of Education to determine which languages are taught and how. Before 1993, other languages were taught primarily in high school. In 1993, it became mandatory to teach another language from fourth grade on. It was mandatory to teach English for at least three of the years, but most schools elected to teach English the entire time due to parental pressures and the view that English was necessary to success.

In 2006, it became mandatory to teach a second language from primary school until graduation. While most schools have elected to teach English, Portuguese is useful, especially in the North where the country borders Brazil. Since many schools already have a stable L2 program, the Ministry in each province is currently standardizing the practices and will submit that information to the National Ministry. From there, national

standards can be set. The law is standardizing and pushing the low-performing schools to catch up.

English is a big selling point in the private schools. Teacher K described it as their “marketing tool.” She said all the schools had to develop excellent English language classrooms because it has been built up in the parents’ minds as the crucial subject for success.

The biggest problem the Doctoras saw with the current language education in Argentina is one that affects all subjects – the lack of qualified teachers. As one teacher put it, there are many people who know the language, but most are not teachers. One proposed solution would require education students who go through the public university (which is free for Argentines) to teach for four years after graduation.

In Texas, foreign language classes are required for two or three years of high school. In smaller areas, the only language option is often Spanish. Like Argentina, good high school language teachers are scarce. Many know the language, but few know how to teach. While the need for the Spanish language continues to grow, state emphasis has not increased. As Teacher K said, “We aren’t governed by the ‘almighty’ TAKS results since we are an unimportant elective. We fly under the radar and set our own curriculum.” Second language instruction is not viewed as a critical component of education, and classroom time often reflects that mentality.

While both systems rely on the individual schools to set the curriculum and standards, there are city (for Argentina) and state (for Texas) standards for each through the National Ministry and the TEKS. These documents, as compared in the previous section, reveal similar goals for language acquisition.

Classroom exercises

The teachers in both Buenos Aires and Texas varied in methods, but almost all used textbooks recommended by the school. They procured the majority of their in-class exercises from these. Table 3 summarizes the similarities and differences between the cultures. While the general classroom exercises tend to be used in the same way, tangible differences are observed in the teachers' use of reading and writing exercises, technology, and literature/writing, and the student's grammar levels and cultural immersion.

Table 3: Classroom exercises results

<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbooks • Grammar level • Listening/Speaking 	<p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argentina <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Advanced grammar --Writing/Literature • Texas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Technology --Cultural activities
---	---

Textbooks

Textbooks were similar in both places. The chapters were context-driven, as is the current popular method, and they highlighted grammar concepts and vocabulary.

Teachers K and FF did not use a specific textbook. They both pulled material from a variety of sources in an “eclectic” fashion. Teacher K covered the same content as the other teachers, but she compiled her material through a variety of sources. Her main reasoning for this is that straight textbook work is boring and allows students to figure out which question they will have to answer in class, prepare for that, and not be engaged in anything else.

At one point, Teacher H told students that if they had not finished a workbook exercise, they should just finish it as the class reviewed it. This highlights the potential ineffectiveness of textbook exercises, as students can just passively fill in the information without making the connection and actively understanding the material.

Elementary school

The elementary and middle school classrooms I observed were structured through textbook activities. One consideration Teacher DD mentioned is that they search for textbooks with minimal writing, especially at the elementary level. If the students are not literate in Spanish yet, they cannot expect to be literate in English. The instructions in those textbooks were very simple, such as “Listen and Repeat” and “Listen, Point and Say.” The continuity with phrases is also helpful for the students.

Speaking

Many times, when going through worksheets, the teachers would read the question or sentence aloud, and the students would respond with a one-word answer. This was especially disheartening because this might be the majority of language practice that students received. Teacher H commented on this, remarking that time constraints forced her to speed through exercises that her students would spend too long trying to pronounce. This suggests that small group exercises provide the ideal opportunity for students to practice conversing in a low-stress manner. Examples of group work from both countries included assignments where students “interviewed” or texted each other. Sometimes they had to ask each other questions using the grammar structure they were working on. Teacher’s J and K also gave student participation grades that depended on the student speaking a set amount of times a week. For Teacher K’s classroom, the mark was once a week. Teacher CC gave students marks for their responses as well. None of the teachers tested specifically for oral competency.

Listening

Aside from hearing the teacher, listening exercises are probably the second-most scarce to come by after speaking practice. In all the Texas classrooms, recordings were repeated by the teacher, which provided a familiar voice to decipher the meanings. Students still reacted strongly against them. In Teacher J’s classroom, the announcement that “Vamos a escuchar” was met with vehement nooooooooo’s. The ability to listen to the language

is one of the most practical uses of the skill, so it should be included, even if met with resistance.

Writing and reading

Teacher AA's school put a large emphasis on writing and literature, which none of the Texas classes did. Not only did students have their normal textbooks, but they also had "Successful Writing (upper intermediate)," which had units covering everything from descriptions to giving opinions. Over the break, the class was also required to read "Deadlock," an 85-page novel. Teacher AA said it was chosen because it did not "contain complex ideas and they could read it by themselves." Large amounts of time were not dedicated to reading or writing in the U.S. classrooms; the focus fell on grammatical instruction.

Grammar

The Argentinean students were ahead of the Texas students with grammar materials. At the same age level, Argentine students were covering complex topics such as the past perfect progressive and learning less literal terms, such as "couch potato," whereas the Texas students were covering the command form of verbs and more basic vocabulary, such as professions.

Teacher CC, who has been teaching for thirty years, had a heavy grammar review in her lesson. It should be noted, however, that I observed her classroom on a day when they

were reviewing for an exam. However, the entire class time was spent filling in conditional sentences, none of which linked in any manner except through their structure. This fits into the historical outline, however, since she probably has retained the perspective that learning grammar is most effective through rote memorization.

When possible, grammar exercises were explained with tricks to memorize them. Irregular command verbs in Spanish were learned as the “DISH” verbs. Teacher K remarked that “the dumber it is, the better it seems to work,” in regards to student tricks to memorize material. These techniques seemed to be different in every classroom I visited, and it could be extremely useful for teacher’s to consolidate these clever ideas.

Cultural activities

The Texas classrooms employed two features more prominently than any of the Argentinean classrooms – cultural activities and technology. The three Spanish teachers discussed how they incorporated cultural activities into classroom time, whether by creating paper mache flowers, making soap, or discussing artwork. This is a big difference because, in Argentina, the cultural infiltration is already present, although maybe not always with the positive representation Americans might desire. Some Argentines associate the U.S. with sex and drugs. The high school perspective was much more innocent though. One day, in Teacher AA’s class, the students burst into a tangent about Hannah Montana and the Jonas Brothers. In that same class, the vacation story discussed the longest was of the student who visited Florida and Disneyland. The

popular music, while dated, stems from the U.S. Students in the U.S., while surrounded by the Hispanic population, are not inculcated into the culture by any means. Their cultural education stems predominately from the classroom setting, which is why the U.S. teachers highlight the importance of classroom cultural exposure.

Technology

The other significant difference is the use of technology. In the Argentinean classrooms, teachers supplemented the textbooks by writing sentences on the chalkboard. A few used c.d. players or tape recorders for listening exercises. In the U.S., the teachers use Smartboards to project their PowerPoint onto the whiteboard. This drastic difference helps with classroom efficiency, as well as the clarity and consistency of the message presented. It also removes the cultural distance for American students. With social media such as YouTube and digital newspapers, the possibilities for legitimate cultural immersion are vast.

The question then becomes, do the teachers take advantage of it? Teacher J, who had a Smartboard in her room, still used the projector. Teacher K, who was not computer competent when she taught me in high school, has progressed to using PowerPoint for lessons via the Smartboard. She also used exercises that allowed students to text each other messages in Spanish. This creative way of incorporating technology allows the teachers to more naturally and efficiently expose their students to the language. Argentine students' main media at home is American, but they have less exposure in the

schools. Teacher AA remarked that her English teacher had shown “Friends” clips when she was in college, but that currently there is a lack of funding to provide the same resources to her students in the classroom.

Teacher habits

Table 4: Teacher habits results

Similarities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily use L2 • Use L1 with understanding barrier • Consistency and repetition 	Difference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micro-managing
---	--

Teacher habits appeared fairly consistent across cultures, as shown in Table 4. Most teachers spoke predominantly in the target language, which was also their L2 (except for one Texas teacher). Sometimes during a lull or when telling a personal story, the teacher would switch to the L1.

Class time

The thought process behind the structure of the classroom exercises was culturally different. In the interviews, the Texas teachers broke down their class time into 5-10 minutes increments. This micro-planning allowed them to remain focused during class time and fits with the U.S. cultural importance of time. For example, Teacher K

sectioned her class time into 3-4 minutes journal time, 5 minutes vocabulary time, 10 minutes grammar notes, 10 minutes activity/game, and finally, writing time. Teacher H also gave a similar minute breakdown of her class time.

The Argentine teachers did not answer in the same manner. They gave an overview of how the time was used, but it was not broken into minute increments. This fits in with time being more fluid in Argentina, where being on time is actually early. An example is from the day an assembly was scheduled. It was supposed to take 15 minutes, so I still came to class. It took an hour, and when the students returned to class the teacher dismissed them. It was not a lazy dismissal, but rather complacent recognition that the lesson plan would not be achieved for the day. Having a stricter time schedule allows the teachers to have a strong idea of what they will accomplish, but having a more general schedule allows teachers to spend more time on a tangent if the class is engaged.

Language during class

When working with grammar concepts, the teachers often explained in the L2 first, and then explained in the L1 whatever the students were having difficulties understanding. Another tactic for the English learning classroom was to explain the concept in English and then check comprehension in Spanish.

There was one disconcerting class in Argentina and one in Texas where the teachers spoke predominately in the L1. One teacher gave the reason for using the L1 as time

efficiency and being unsure of the level of her students. Classroom time for Teacher H often proceeded as shown in Figure 11:

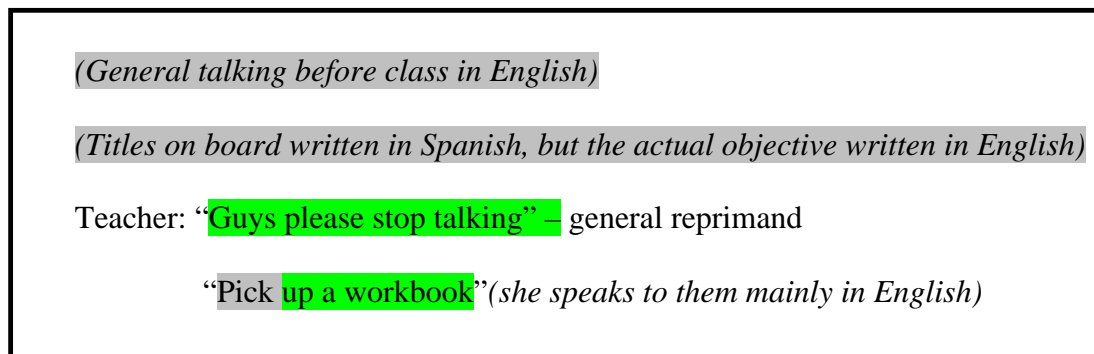


Figure 11: Classroom time: L1 example.

This is not a longitudinal study, so I cannot compare the students’ long-term results between classes. However, in those classes, the only L2 input the students received was from their textbook. Not only is this known to create passive knowledge, but, as discussed in a previous section, it can lead to students just filling in the teacher’s answers.

Selective feedback

When giving feedback, the teachers had to selectively respond to the student’s responses. One sentence might contain errors of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The teachers would correct whatever the focus of the exercise was. Often, if the goal was met, then the teachers would simply give positive feedback and ignore

the other issues. With repetitive errors on basic concepts, all the teachers provided immediate correction. For example, when one student said “I have 14 years,” Teacher AA immediately corrected with “I AM 14 years OLD.” The success of teaching depends on the wise choice of battles.

Consistency and repetition

The final important qualities the teachers all possessed were consistency and repetition. As mentioned previously, the teachers tended to use the same phrases for typical classroom instructions. Repetition is a must, as it provides the students with needed time to process the L2 and draw connections to meaning. All the teachers constantly repeated the information they were reviewing and the questions they would pose to the class.

Students liked to respond or ask questions in their L1. The most effective method to counter this was the teacher responding with the same phrase every time. For example, if Teacher AA said “Sorry?”, the students would immediately repeat themselves in English. Teacher J would say “ingles no, ingles no” (No English, no English). By responding consistently, the students were trained to respond consistently as well – in the target language.

*L1/cultural influence***Table 5:** L1/Cultural influence results

<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •L1 carryover •Intonation/accent
--

L1 carryover

Table 5 summarizes the similarities found in the cultural overlap. It was interesting to see when the L1 would affect student acquisition of L2. Some L1 carryovers did not impede communication, but rather stamped the speaker with his or her culture. For example, in Argentine Spanish, when someone says “thanks,” the recipient says “no, a vos,” or “no, you are welcome.” I heard several Argentine students use this phrasing when responding to teachers.

Intonation/accent

Intonation provides a struggle for students. In Argentina, the almost Italian-sounding rhythm pours into their pronunciation of English. Several times, teachers would ask students to restate their sentences in an affirmative manner, as opposed to using rising intonation that made them sound like a question. In the Texas classroom, students would retain the American accent. This was especially apparent when they spoke cognates. One time, Teacher H told her students to try to make it “sound Spanish.”

Other influences

Table 6: Other influences results

Differences:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argentina <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --British textbooks --American media • Texas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Mexican influence --Negative connotation

British influence

As Table 6 shows, the other influences are quite different for Argentina and Texas.

While American culture might flood the Argentine students' iPods, the British have infiltrated their textbooks and testing. The teachers were taught in British English, and many had negative views of the impact of American culture.

American influence

At the same time, however, the most prestigious school in Buenos Aires, Lincoln High, is modeled after the American system of schooling. This school, conducted in English,

hosts the children of the dignitaries of Argentina, from politicians to ambassadors. With such prestige, it was interesting to learn that they follow the American school model – from the calendar year to what topics are covered within subjects. The students even succumbed to the lovely “like” fad; during my observations, most sentences involved instances of “I have, like, 10 pencils.” Another classroom at a private school in Buenos Aires sported posters of Shakespeare, but also student projects about celebrities like Jennifer Aniston. The 3rd grade class textbook used Lilo and Stitch as main characters throughout the lessons. In Teacher AA’s classroom, one group presentation focused on family values and “Family Guy,” a comedy that includes a baby that wants to harm its mother, among other less than desirable qualities. These examples show that while British English might be considered more correct, the students definitely respond to English stemming from American culture.

Hispanic influence

In the United States, the Spanish language and culture is not viewed favorably. Mexican Spanish tends to influence the classroom since that is the primary Spanish group students would be communicating with. However, the language itself often has negative connotations, as it is stereotyped with illegal immigrants and low-wage workers. This viewpoint does not do justice to the richness and diversity of the Spanish language and culture. With the increase of the Hispanic population in the United States, exposure to the culture should rise, but it is yet to be seen if that will have a negative or positive effect.

Motivational influence

While the aforementioned factors all influence the acquisition of L2, they all involve the macro-ideas or the teacher's perspective. In order to understand the motivational influences in a classroom, it is imperative to understand how the student's relate to the information being presented. Schumann's model of five categories provides a framework through which student motivation in the classroom can be interpreted. Argentina and Texas had very different results for the motivational influence, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Motivational influence results

Similarities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasantness • Coping Potential 	Differences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argentina <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Novelty --Self and social image --Goal or need significance (job) • Texas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Goal or need significance (grade)
---	--

Two of the categories presented, pleasantness and coping potential, are largely determined by the teacher.

Pleasantness

Many times students are discouraged by the perceived difficulty of using a second language. Sometimes they simply dislike the textbook work. One student in Teacher AA's class went so far as to say, "I hate this exercise; I don't see the point of it." These

were strong words coming from an L2 speaker, and they reflect the need in L2 classrooms for a variety of activities in order to reach different learners and keep them engaged. The pleasantness factor takes this need into account.

The pleasantness factor was increased by the teachers' attempts to incorporate desirable topics into the classroom time. For example, Teacher AA asked students to talk about their vacations as a warm-up exercise. Teacher J began class by asking a student about her weekend and her sister's experience as homecoming queen. Teacher AA explained that sometimes she will "invent a little bit on the way" if students are particularly interested in a topic or activity in order to maintain that voluntary participation.

The teachers' interactions with the students in general showed a tendency towards creating a pleasant environment that encouraged students to participate and increase their knowledge. For example, when one Argentine student began a sentence in Spanish saying "parece que," Teacher A gently led her into English by saying, "yes, it seems that..." This ability to correct without embarrassing is a crucial skill for second language teachers. Another time, Teacher H had a student respond enthusiastically in English. Teacher H responded just as enthusiastically, "Great, now in Spanish!" She corrected the student, set the standard, and maintained a level of praise and encouragement. A nonverbal factor that enhanced pleasantness was the use of cultural music while the students worked. Both Teachers J and K use this sometimes at the end of the class while the students begin their homework.

Sometimes, however, classroom time would grow stagnant. In one exercise, Teacher H read the sentences in Spanish and then translated them to English. The answers were already on the PowerPoint on the board. Since there was no interaction and they already had the answers, the students had no incentive to pay attention. Teachers need to carefully evaluate their passive exercises to determine how to best engage their students and maintain pleasantness.

Coping potential

This quality ties in with the pleasantness factor. Students' self-confidence about L2 acquisition is partially determined by how pleasant the teacher makes the classroom environment. If students are hesitant to speak in front of the class, then they will not take the initiative necessary to practice and receive feedback. If they are nervous about being called upon during an exercise, their attention will not be on the content, but rather on perfecting their answer before having to speak. Teacher K has observed this in her class and remembers doing that when she was a Spanish student.

Writing and reading exercises are typically easier on the students because they have more time to sit and think about them. When the topic shifts to listening and speaking, students sometimes have strong adverse reactions. In Teacher J's class, the introduction of a listening exercise brought about moans and "Noooooooo." This is something that was more observed in the Texas classrooms. I would presume Argentine students have a

higher coping potential with listening exercises because they hear more English through their popular media. American students do not.

For teachers, the challenge is to maintain an environment that maintains the L2 focus while cultivating the student's self-confidence. Most of the teachers I observed were able to do this through their feedback. Figure 12 shows one exchange from Teacher J's class:

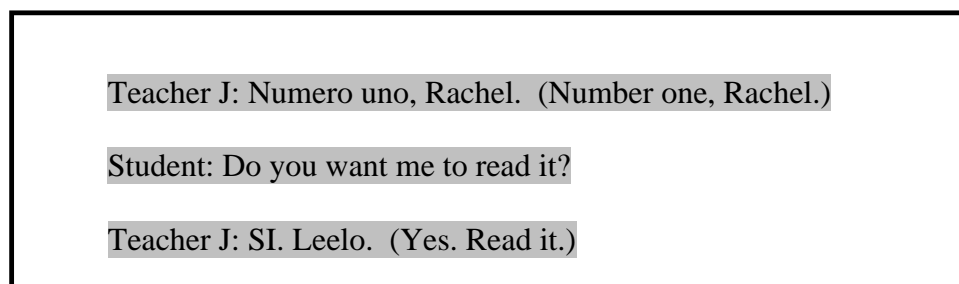


Figure 12: Coping potential.

In this example, the teacher did not even acknowledge the student's hesitation about responding to the assignment. Her response maintained and asked for an L2 focus without directly reprimanding the student or lessening the student's coping potential. Teacher J also regularly asked students "Voy rapido?" (Am I moving too quickly?), which opened a safe opportunity for the students to provide feedback if she was speaking too quickly. Teacher H, during a classroom exercise, reminded students that they just needed to "write as much as" they could. This relieved some of the pressure to speed through the exercise and modified the goal to where every individual could handle it at an appropriate level. If the students gave the wrong answer, Teacher DD would

make a confused facial expression and ask “Is that really what it is?” This gave the students a non-threatening opportunity to change their answer.

This motivational factor shows why it is important to begin language learning at an early age. Younger students are less inhibited and more willing to speak and listen in the L2. Teacher DD, who teaches elementary classrooms, stated that students are embarrassed to talk in front of peers by the 4th or 5th grade. This supports the idea to begin language instruction early, so that the students can already have a foundation before coping potential decreases. This, combined with supportive and considerate teacher feedback, can lead to an increase in coping potential for all students, but especially those in Texas.

Novelty

This quality identifies the student’s level of familiarity with the language. Teachers can establish familiarity through interactive and innovative activities. From the student perspective, it became highly apparent that those in Argentina had a higher level of positive familiarity with English than those in Texas had with Spanish.

In the elementary classroom in Buenos Aires, the mornings began with the same greetings everyday, as shown in Figure 13. This familiarity was necessary for the younger children to help them retain key phrases and give them an opportunity to speak in the classroom. Younger children need a consistent routine. As mentioned in the teacher habits section, consistency is a part of all language learning classrooms. The

teacher's use of the same phrases allows the students to become accustomed to the accent and important words.

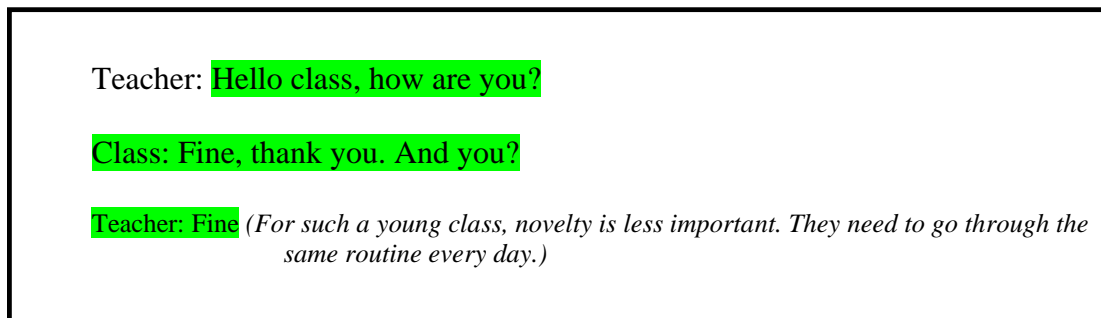


Figure 13: Elementary classroom.

All the teachers mentioned trying to use activities that would interest the student.

Teacher AA talked about when her class watched an apartheid movie. She said that the students were so interested afterwards that they were “speaking English without asking to speak in English.” For her, that was the epitome of what the class should be like.

I observed highly interactive classroom activities, so most students were familiar with the classroom style and engaged. Teacher AA maintained student attention during exercises by predominantly giving her natural responses to student comments. For example, during one exercise, a student said, “I would pick a milk and brush.” Teacher AA’s response was, “Milk and brush? What are you going to do with that?!” This almost sarcastic response forces the students to be engaged and process their answers before just automatically responding.

Other creative ways to enhance novelty included one teacher wearing a crown on her head that said “evidence,” which enhanced the emphasis on how she wanted papers written. Another teacher would diagram sentences on the board when going through grammar concepts, which allowed students to visually compare their L1 structure to the L2 structure. This increases novelty as students are able to connect the information to existing knowledge.

The use of technology increases novelty in the class. Teacher K tries to incorporate text messaging into her class time. She will let students text conversations in Spanish. During our interview, she highlighted this exercise because by using something that students love, their familiarity, as well as pleasantness, associated with the task is increased.

In Argentina, sometimes it is easier to get this novelty with the subject matter. Argentine high school students have been inculcated with American culture through popular media. In between classes students would talk about Hannah Montana and Disney. Since these are the cool topics, learning English is associated with that, and there is a higher degree of novelty with the subject.

In Texas, Spanish culture is not considered nearly as cool. While students in Texas probably do see Hispanic influences in their community or in their classmates, there is no craze for the culture. There is little to no novelty with the culture here, and this affects students understanding of the importance of the language.

Self and social image

How does the L2 fit into the social norms and views of the student? Is it “cool” to learn an L2? For the classrooms in Buenos Aires and College Station specifically, this motivational factor played a different role.

In high school, peer pressure plays a large role in a student’s classroom behavior. In both cultures, classroom management was imperative to maintaining control. In my observations, only one classroom had difficulty with this. The teacher was asking for students to complete fill-in-the-blank textbook exercises. She was calling on one student at a time and focusing on him/her. The rest of the students were distracted as they talked in the background. One student was even listening to an iPod. In this situation, the students maintained their self-image by disrupting the classroom activities. This exemplifies why classroom management is integral to teaching success.

This factor ties into the novelty factor. In Argentina, learning English is congruent with one’s social image. They all love American media, and it is “cool” to do things like travel to Disney for winter break (as one student did). This is a something that is less true once you leave Buenos Aires. As Teacher AA described, in the more rural areas, English is “so far from their reality” that there is no social incentive to learn it. Also, in these cases, the schooling level is so poor that the students would probably benefit more from additional time learning their L1, Spanish.

In the U.S., we do not have the same strong positive affiliations with Spanish. For most students, the ideal vacation is not to South America. Those countries are considered poor and unsafe. Thus, self or social image is not enhanced through association with the Spanish culture.

Goal or need significance

While all the factors contribute to motivation, this one is perhaps the most important.

Goal or needs significance indicates how this L2 fits into the students' personal goals or needs. Often with students, there is a lack of goals to motivate. Through these observations, I was able to determine where goals or need were present or not present.

Simple goals were shown in both cultures when the students were encouraged to give a teacher-approved response. In Argentina, the scene ensued as shown in Figure 14:

Student (response): No aprendes.
Teacher: Sorry?"
Student: You don't learn (<i>Goal is to answer Teacher's question</i>)

Figure 14: Goal or need significance classroom example.

In this situation, the teacher's short response immediately gave the student the goal of responding appropriately to appease the teacher. Situations like this appeared in all classrooms.

Some teachers explained the rationale behind certain exercises; others did not. For example, Teacher K explained to her students that they do listening exercises precisely because they are challenging. While the students still may not like them, at least they understand that the struggle is not a personal failure. When questioned about writing in English, Teacher AA remarked that while the students are taught to write more directly and concisely, as English writing requires, she had never explained to students that there are cultural differences between writing that make it different.

In Argentina, all the teachers interviewed were very conscious that their students would need a strong background in English in order to interview for a job. Teacher CC categorized the job interviews in five tests: skills, psychology, health, computer, and English. The teachers recognize the importance; the students' parents recognize the importance; and the students at least know it will be part of their job interview. The classrooms I observed had the general mix of some students ardently participating and others disengaged. However, they know that they will need to be able to hold a conversation in English in order to obtain a decent job.

For students in Texas, the goal outside of the classroom is less defined. While there are many benefits to learning an L2, it is not vital in the same way as it is in Argentina. It also does not have the same positive novelty factor or contribution to social image. Since most students are not aware of, or do not care about, the cultural, intellectual, or professional benefits of an L2, the goal significance is almost non-existence. The teachers I interviewed recognized that Spanish would be useful to communicate with community members, and they also highlighted that it would be useful for vacations. However, the same urgency or necessity is not present.

However, since students are still attending class and passing (for the most part), there must be some goal significance. This was found through the goal of passing the class. In Texas, since 2 -3 years of L2 is required to graduate, there is an incentive. Within the classroom, teachers can remind the students of this, as Teacher H did when she said, “You will have a section like this on your quiz tomorrow.” Immediately, the current work is contributing to a goal of succeeding on an exam.

In both classrooms, grades contribute to the goal significance. However, in the U.S., this is the main contributor, whereas, in Argentina, the job interview provides incentive as well.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Through learning language, we learn about culture.

Through learning about culture, we learn respect for others.

Through learning respect for others, we can hope for peace.

--Frank Smith

This study must be analyzed in the context of its limitations, but even with those, this study provides a comparison of two distinct L2 classrooms that can learn from each other and improve their instruction.

As highlighted in the methodology section, two main limitations should be considered. This research contributes an assessment of interviews and observations throughout two weeks in Buenos Aires, Argentina and three months in College Station, Texas. While the original project designated six weeks in Argentina, the swine flu outbreak closed all schools and limited my time. Thus, my data, though rich, is limited. However, they provide an interesting starting point from which other questions and studies can arise.

The other limitation in this study is that it is particular to Spanish and English in the L2 classroom. A study between Arabic and English as L2 classrooms could provide completely different results, especially in regards to classroom exercises.

However, keeping in mind these limitations, this study provides a few key trends that can serve as useful information for L2 teachers who are striving to improve their classroom success, especially for teachers of Spanish in the U.S.

Strengths

Both systems had several strengths. The national government of Argentina and the state of Texas have both set clear standards for the language classrooms in regards to what content should be covered throughout the progression of L2 instruction. The detailed map also provides a form to measure students' progress.

In Argentina, a major strength is the cultural exposure that the students receive through multimedia in their homes. Also, since most receive L2 instruction from K-12, they have a longer and more thorough background. These strengths increase student coping potential, novelty, and goals significance. In Texas, the biggest strength is access to technology. Some teachers utilized their computers and whiteboards to display lessons via PowerPoint, to play clips, and to show cultural pictures. The integration allows for more diverse information to be presented, as well as increases novelty by using a medium that students enjoy.

Areas for improvement

Almost every teacher discussed the struggle to incorporate an adequate amount of listening and speaking exercises. Even in Argentina, where there is a greater outside

influence of American media, the teachers still felt that they had difficulties including those exercises in the class. This is partially due to students strong reactions against those exercises because they struggle with them. In general, for both countries, it would be beneficial to develop a stronger curriculum in those areas. It also seems imperative to explain to students why they are doing difficult exercises so they know that it is not a waste of time.

In Argentina, an improved focus on micro-managing could assist to focus the lessons more and achieve more during classroom time. All the Argentine teachers I interviewed explained the breakdown of their classroom time in very general terms. When only given forty-five minutes to an hour and half every day or three times a week, every minute should be accounted for in order to be most effective. This reflects a cultural difference, as time is very relative in Argentina. But if teachers were encouraged to break their lessons into 5-10 minutes increments, this would help to keep the focus. The other area for improvement, and this ties into the need for more auditory exercises, is to increase access to technology resources that would benefit the classroom. Not only do the students need to develop those skills for the professional world, but it would increase the diversity of exercises available. Until the country reaches the economic level to do this, other resources could involve the teacher bringing in a personal laptop to integrate some technology or assigning the students some at-home work that uses the computer or TV. C.d. players are cheap, and the teachers could use those to play songs or stories in the

class. Although the funds for technology are not there yet, creative solutions can incorporate technology.

For Texas, technology is not the issue. However, the use of the technology could be improved. While the classrooms I observed all had a teacher computer that connected a projector onto the whiteboard, not every teacher used the equipment. Using technology cuts down time needed for things like writing examples or answers on the board. It also gives the students access to the Internet, which can provide boundless opportunities for cultural exposure through news and media sites. Technology use in the classroom would give students an opportunity to catch up on their lack of cultural exposure. It also presents the material in a familiar way that appeals to students, thus increasing novelty and pleasantness in the classroom. By showing funny clips or soccer ads, for example, the teachers could find material that will engage the students.

Finally, and most importantly, goal significance needs to be increased. At the state level, this can occur by requiring more years of L2 instruction in school and by requiring state standards for students to progress to the next level. Teachers need to increase the students' understanding of goal significance. Students are not aware of the benefits associated with learning an L2, especially the benefits of Spanish in Texas, and until they understand why it is important, they will have no reason to be motivated beyond just passing the class.

Final suggestions

L2 instruction includes many outside factors such as classroom size, student's previous knowledge, administrative policies, resources available, and classroom structure. Even with these factors, if teachers and state officials take into account these findings, then we can strengthen our language instruction. In Argentina, the effort is already there. As they smooth out teaching methods and have more access to funds, they should be able to easily continue producing bilingual students. In Texas, we have a longer way to go. However, the road to producing bilingual students would be well worth the effort.

We need to ascertain if teachers are trained to be aware of the embarrassment factor, common struggles students face, what is practical for their students to learn, how to contextualize the information, why students have to talk, and how to use familiar phrases.

Future studies to further explore these findings could include experimenting with different media in the classroom to see which receive better student response (i.e. PowerPoint or writing on the board, listening exercises from the teacher or a recording, etc). It would also be helpful to learn what information effectively motivates Texas students to acquire Spanish as an L2. I would also like to longitudinally evaluate whether students acquire more knowledge (based off state TEKS standards) from teachers who predominately follow one textbook or those who pick and choose from a variety of sources.

Finally, it would be good to give teachers a rubric with which they can self-assess their classroom. We could learn how L2 teachers in Texas rank themselves in regards to the following variables: amount of L1 v. L2 used, technology use, student interest, workbook time, talk time, listening time, writing time, grammar time and discipline time. This self-analysis could help them to improve the areas where they are lacking.

These are timely questions, which, if not addressed could cause our educational system to fall even further behind other countries. While we may not need Spanish as an L2 to function in the world, we should set our goals to produce students of equal, if not higher, caliber than other countries. At this point, our L2 instruction is subpar when compared to other countries that produce bilingual students. However, we certainly have the resources, and by using them intentionally and increasing the emphasis on L2 instruction, we could rise to world standards in L2 education.

REFERENCES

- Aijmener, K. (2009). Introduction. In K. Aijmer (Ed), *Corpora and language teaching* (pp. 1-10). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Andalo, D. (2007, March 12). All primary schools to teach foreign languages by 2010. *Guardian News*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2007/mar/12/schools.uk>
- Arnove, R. (2007). Introduction: Reframing comparative education: The dialectic of the global and the local. In R. Arnove & C. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative education* (pp. 1-20). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Arnove, R., Franz, S., & Torres, C. (2007). Education in Latin America: Dependency, underdevelopment, and inequality. In R. Arnove & C. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative education* (pp. 277-294). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bangaerts, T., Planken, B., & Schils, E. (1995). Can late starters attain a native accent in a foreign language? A test of the critical period hypothesis. In D. Singleton & Z. Lengyel (Eds.), *The age factor in SLA* (pp. 30-45). Bristol, PA: Multilingual Matters.
- Berman, E., Marginson, S., Preston, R., & Arnove, R. (2007). The political economy of educational reform in Australia, England, and the United States. In R. Arnove & C. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative education* (pp. 217-256). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Merriam-Webster Online*. (2009). Bilingual. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bilingual>
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2010). Map of Argentina. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ar.html>
- Cohen, A. & Dornyei, Z. (2002). Focus on the language learner: Motivation, styles and strategies. In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 170-190). New York, NY: Hodder Arnold.
- Dorronzoro, M. & Klett, E. (2005). Didáctica de las lenguas extranjeras – una agenda actual. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Arancaria Editoria.
- Eggen, D. (2006, October 11). FBI agents still lacking Arabic skills. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/10/10/AR2006101001388_pf.html
- Ellis, R., Elder, C., & Loewen, S. (2009). *Implicit and explicit knowledge in second language learning, testing and teaching*. Toronto, Canada: Multilingual Matters.
- Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., & Hyams, N. (2007). *An introduction to language*. Boston, MA: Thomson.
- Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. (2001). Diseño curricular de lenguas extranjeras. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Author. Retrieved from http://estatico.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/educacion/curricula/dle_web.pdf

- Granger, S. (2009). The contribution of learner corpora to second language acquisition and foreign language teaching. In K. Aijmer (Ed), *Corpora and language teaching* (pp. 13-40). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Kaplan, R. (2001). Cultural thought patterns in inter-cultural education. In T. Silva & P. Matsuda (Ed.), *Landmark essays on ESL writing*, (pp. 11-26). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2003). *Teaching language - From grammar to grammaring*. Boston, MI: Thomson Heinle.
- Lightbown, P., & Spada, N. (2002). Second language acquisition. In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 115-132). New York, NY: Hodder Arnold.
- LOTE Center for Educator Development. (2006). LOTE teacher competencies for professional development. Texas: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.sedl.org/loteced/products/competencies.pdf>
- LOTE Center for Educator Development. (2003a). Project ExCell: Developing the TEKS for LOTE. Texas: Author. Retrieved http://www.sedl.org/loteced/TEKS_excell.html
- LOTE Center for Educator Development. (2003b). The guiding principles of LOTE education. Texas: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.sedl.org/loteced/principles.html>

- Lowe, S. (2008, September 23). One-in-five speak Spanish in four states. [Press release]. *U.S. Census Bureau News*. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/american_community_survey_acs/012634.html
- McRae, J. (1985). *Using drama in the classroom*. Oxford, NY: Pergamon Press.
- Masemann, V. (2007). Culture and education. In R. Arnove & C. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative education* (pp. 101-116). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- National Assessment Governing Board. (2000). Framework for the 2004 foreign language national assessment of educational progress. Center for Applied Linguistics: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.nagb.org/publications/frameworks/FinalFrameworkPrePubEdition1.pdf>
- O’Keeffe, A., McCarthy, M., & Carter, R. (2007). *From corpus to classroom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Reid, S. (2002). *Book bridges for ESL students: Using young adult and children’s literature to teach ESL*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Rein, M. (1998). *Politics and education in Argentina 1946-1962*. New York, NY: Sharpe, Inc.
- The Economist*. (2010, January 7). Reshaping politics. Retrieved from http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=15213252
- Samoff, J. (2007). Institutionalizing international influence. In R. Arnove & C. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative education* (pp. 47-77). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield
- Sampat, P. (2001). Last words. *World watch*. Retrieved from http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-10467804_ITM

- Schugurensky, D. (2007). Higher education restructuring in the era of globalization: toward a heteronomous model?. In R. Arnove & C. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative education* (pp. 257-276). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Schumann, J. (2001). Learning as foraging. In Z Dornyei & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Motivation and second language acquisition* (Technical report #23, pp. 21-28). Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center.
- Texas Education Agency. (2004). An overview of the history of public education in Texas. Texas: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=148>
- Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. (2010). Chapter 114. Texas essential knowledge and skills for languages other than English: Subchapter C. High School. Texas: Author. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter114/ch114c.pdf>
- Texas Physical Geography Map. [Map]. (2007). Maps.com. Retrieved from https://www.maps.com/ref_map.aspx?cid=680,692,790,1262&pid=12759
- Torres, C. & Puiggros, A. (1997). Introduction: The state and public education in Latin America. In C. Torres & A. Puiggros (Eds.), *Latin American education comparative perspectives*. (pp. 1-28). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Welch, A. (2007). Technocracy, uncertainty, and ethics: Comparative education in an era of postmodernity and globalization. In R. Arnove & C. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative education* (pp. 21-45). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Wenner, M. (2010, January). The neural advantage of speaking 2 languages. *Scientific American*. Retrieved from <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=bilingual-brains>
- White, L. (1989). *Universal grammar and second language acquisition*. Philadelphia, PA: Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Zamenhof, L. (1887). *Dr. Esperanto's international language*. Retrieved from Gene Keyes website: http://www.genekeyes.com/Dr_Esperanto.html

APPENDIX

Standard interview questions for English L2 teachers*

*For Spanish L2 teachers, swap the word “English” with “Spanish”

BASIC INFO

- How long have you taught high school students?
- What grades do you teach?
- What levels do you teach?
- What is the usual classroom size?
- How long have you taught English?
- What is the general socio-economic background of the students?
- Is the language you are teaching your native language?
- What cultural interactions have you had involving the language you teach?
- What is your educational philosophy?
- What are your thoughts about acquiring a second language?

CLASSROOM STRUCTURE

- How are your seats laid out?
- Do you have assigned seating?
- How many native language students are in the class?
- Where do you prefer to be when you teach?
- Do your students ever move around?

CLASSROOM STYLE

- How is the teaching plan determined? Is it based off anything?
- How are students tested?
- Would you consider written or oral skills more important for your students?
- Which do students struggle more with?
- What is a normal day in your classroom like?
- Are you able to get much one-on-one time with the students?
- Are students allowed to speak in their native language in the classroom?
- What obstacles do students have to overcome to effectively learn the language?
- For the students who struggle the most, what are common factors?
- What is your motivation to teach this language?
- How are students encouraged to learn this language?
- Does this class transcend the classroom?
- What difficulties do you encounter as a teacher?
- What are qualities a good teacher needs to have?
- What do you consider “success” for your students at the end of the year?
- What level of language proficiency do you think most of your students graduate high school with?
- Could they have a conversation with a native speaker or navigate a foreign country?

BROADER

- How do you think Argentina compares to second language teaching?
- What improvement could be made to the way second languages are taught in Argentina?
- How would an ideal language classroom/system work in your mind?
- There is a large, almost obsessive, push to learn English in Buenos Aires. What do you think are the reasons for that?
- Do you think that the emphasis is to a point where people lose some of their culture in an effort to obtain this ideal?
- How important is it for the teacher to have an understanding of the student's native language?
- As pertains to writing, there is a cultural difference in which English culture tends to be more direct with writing, whereas Spanish culture allows more digression. Is this addressed?

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Lara Ashley Speights

Professional Address: c/o Dr. Valerie Balester
University Writing Center - Evans Library 1.214
MS 5000
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843

Email Address: laspeights@gmail.com

Education: B.A., English and Spanish, Texas A&M University, May
2010
Summa Cum Laude
Honors Undergraduate Research Fellow