



# DIMENSION 2019

Karen Acosta  
Julie Carver  
Alison Clifton  
Kelly F. Davidson  
Haning Z. Hughes  
Victoria Russell  
Anna Surin

EDITOR  
**Paula Garrett-Rucks**

*Dimension* is the annual volume of peer-reviewed articles sponsored by the 2019 Joint Conference of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching, the Southeastern Association of Language Learning Technology (SEALLT), the Foreign Language Association of North Carolina (FLANC), and the South Carolina Foreign Language Teachers' Association (SCFLTA).



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## Review and Acceptance Procedures

### SCOLT *Dimension*

The procedures through which articles are reviewed and accepted for publication in *Dimension* begin by the authors emailing manuscripts to the editor at SCOLT. [Dimension@gmail.com](mailto:Dimension@gmail.com).

The editor then uses a double blind review process to review the manuscripts. That is, the names and academic affiliations of the authors and information identifying schools and colleges cited in articles are removed from the manuscripts prior to review by members of the Editorial Board, all of whom are published professionals, committed to second language education at research universities. Neither the author(s) nor the reviewers know the identity of one another during the review process. Each manuscript is reviewed by at least two members of the Editorial Board of Reviewers, and one of the following recommendations is made: “accept as is,” “request a second draft with minor revisions,” “request a second draft with major revisions,” or “do not publish.” The editor then requests second drafts of manuscripts that receive favorable ratings on the initial draft. These revised manuscripts are reviewed a second time before a final decision to publish is made.

The editor of *Dimension* 2019 invited prospective authors at all levels of language teaching to submit original work for publication consideration without having to commit to presenting a paper at the annual meeting of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching. Starting as a proceedings publication, *Dimension* has now become the official peer-reviewed journal of SCOLT and is published once annually in the spring. To improve visibility of the authors’ work, the Board voted to publish the journal on the SCOLT website in an open access format. In the first few years of being placed online for global consumption, authors’ work is being read and cited globally.

## **SCOLT Editorial Review Board 2019**

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With gratitude to the additional reviewers and proofreaders

Shuai Li  
Sara Fortenberry

## Leaving Lasting Footprints

The Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT) held its annual conference March 21-23, 2019, at the Sheraton Myrtle Beach and Convention Center in collaboration with the Southeastern Association of Language Learning Technology (SEALLT), the Foreign Language Association of North Carolina (FLANC) and the South Carolina Foreign Language Teachers' Association (SCFLTA). Starting as a proceedings publication, *Dimension* is now the official peer-reviewed journal of SCOLT that publishes national and international authors once a year. In this year's volume, there are five articles that provide readers insight into a variety of research on the teaching and learning of languages and cultures.

This year's volume begins with a chapter in which author Julie Carver (Georgia State University) reports on her investigation of how beginning French language learners perceived the use of images and the social media site Instagram as a means to encourage interaction in an online discussion board and to develop beginning L2 writing skills. This manuscript extends computer-mediated communication research by including a previously underserved population—beginning language learners completing language requirements at the collegiate level. Additionally, the study investigated the use of Instagram, which has been less widely researched than other more established social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter. The pedagogical implications as well as suggestions for future research on mobile-assisted language learning at beginning levels of instruction are discussed.

In Chapter 2, Alison Clifton (Roanoke College) offers insights into the role of grammatical terminology in beginning-level French language textbooks and implications for instruction from her investigation of eight widely-used French textbooks. The author found the grammar explanations examined in the study commonly contained a large number of grammatical terms that many times were not defined. The pedagogical implications encourage readers to consider how grammar is presented in textbooks and how to best use textbooks as a tool to guide learners' language proficiency development.

Next, in Chapter 3, author Haning Z. Hughes (United States Air Force Academy) details how film can be used effectively in the classroom to increase students' proficiencies in reading, writing, listening, and speaking while enhancing student cultural awareness. In this model, Chinese language learners are exposed to authentic language usage in films that verbally and visually depict societal perspectives and cultural insight across various regions and historical eras. The author provides a detailed curriculum design and instructional methodology to create an entertaining and interesting student-centered language learning environment with challenging language and culture learning opportunities across proficiency levels.

In Chapter 4, Karen Acosta (Valdosta State University) reports findings from her study on the reading strategies of college Spanish language learners across proficiency levels—beginning, intermediate and advanced. The findings suggest that all readers used their first language, with qualitative differences in translation strategies across proficiency levels, when reading in their second language. Pedagogical implications on ways to teach reading strategies explicitly are discussed.



In the final chapter, authors Anna Surin (North Forsyth High School and Valdosta State University), Victoria Russell (Valdosta State University) and Kelly F. Davidson (Valdosta State University) put into question teacher training practices that assume learners to be monolingual when starting their world language study. Specifically, the authors investigated the training and professional development that French teachers reported receiving concerning research-based strategies for teaching French as a third language to speakers that may be native or heritage speakers of a language other than English, especially in light of the growing number of Hispanic students. This manuscript opens the discussion for the need of training practices and continued professional development to reflect the realities of the classroom.

As Editor, I worked collaboratively with the Editorial Review Board in a double blind, peer-review process and I would like to extend my gratitude to them for having shared their knowledge and expertise reviewing the articles for *Dimension* 2019. These individuals are leaders in their fields and I greatly appreciate their time and energy. On behalf of the editorial team, I believe that readers will find the articles in this edition informative and inspiring. Please be sure to thank: (1) attending authors for contributing their work to *Dimension*, (2) members of the Editorial Review Board for assisting their colleagues in the preparation of the articles, and (3) the SCOLT Sponsors and Patrons for their ongoing financial support that makes *Dimension* possible

**The Editor,**

**Paula Garrett-Rucks**  
*Georgia State University*

# InstaFrench: An Investigation of Learner Perceptions of Social Media and Images to Develop L2 Writing

Julie Carver

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## Abstract

*Social media has quickly become an integral part of day-to-day interaction for many university students. This exploratory study investigated the use of the social media site Instagram for written discussions in three introductory French classes (n= 83). Specifically, student perception on the role of image as a mediational tool (Vygotsky, 1978) to support writing and reading processes was explored. Findings from survey data showed that participants perceived image to play a role in four areas: their preferences for certain writing topics, their choices to engage (or not engage) in discussion with their peers, their reading comprehension, and their writing. Pedagogical implications and potential for future academic inquiry are discussed.*

**Key words:** social media, mobile assisted language learning (MALL), Instagram, French, L2 writing

## Background

With the rise in popularity of social media among college students in recent years, an increasing number of studies have explored how learners' intrinsic motivation to share aspects of their lives online may be used to enhance language learning. This propensity for sharing real-world experiences via the internet could potentially be useful in encouraging language learners to have meaningful interactions in their target language. However, the majority of research into computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social media has focused on intermediate and advanced language learners (Beauvois, 1998; Belz, 2002). Less has been done with respect to the ever-increasing number of university students enrolled in obligatory beginning language courses. Additionally, studies have looked into modes of communication that lack a visual component, or where the presence of images is viewed as optional and supplementary (McBride, 2009; Lomicka & Lord, 2012). When considering language teaching practices on the other hand, images are viewed as essential to the learning process, especially for beginning language courses (MLA Report, 2007; Omaggio-Hadley, 2001). With the aforementioned gaps in the literature in mind, the current study explored the use of Instagram, a social media site where users post images and a caption, as a platform for online discussion in three second-semester French classes. Specifically, qualitative survey data revealed participants' associations between images and several aspects of online discussion postings: topic preferences, commenting practices, reading comprehension, and writing.

## Literature Review

Over the past twenty years, there has been an influx of studies investigating various factors of CMC. Chun (2008) defines CMC as the “use of computers and the internet to communicate online” (p. 15). Although there are several modes of CMC, this study is primarily concerned with asynchronous CMC, which is characterized by interactions that do not occur in real time. There are several purported benefits to CMC, including reduced anxiety (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994), increased motivation (Warschauer, 1996), and the production of more lengthy and complex language than with synchronous CMC (Kitade, 2006, Sotillo, 2000). An important advantage to asynchronous CMC for the beginning language learning context in particular is the fact that learners have more time to compare and compose their responses. Beauvois (1998) refers to this phenomenon as ‘conversation in slow motion.’ The reduced stress could encourage learners to interact with one another more freely, increasing the likelihood that shy or hesitant to speak learners will participate (Beauvois, 1998; Chun 1994; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996).

When considering motivation and learner perception, there are many factors to take into account. Echoing Gardner’s Construct of the Integrative Motive, Dörnyei (1994) showed that one factor leading to language learning motivation is the student attitude towards the learning situation, including their evaluation of the L2 course, suggesting that the students’ appraisal of course materials and methods can have a positive or negative influence on student motivation to learn the L2. In a pilot study conducted by Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini, and Ratcheva (2013), learners indicated that among their top ten most important motivational strategies was “relating the subject content and learning tasks to the everyday experiences and backgrounds of the students” (p. 42). Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) had similar results in their study, stating, “[...] the task of the foreign language teacher and researcher is also to curb and use influences which extend beyond the school context” (p. 443). Thus, it is necessary for instructors to identify these outside influences to maximize student learning. Additionally, Schmidt and Watanabe (2001) called for research investigating student reception of specific types of pedagogical activities. With the need to identify links between motivation, foreign language pedagogy, and external sources of motivation for students, instructors must consider how students spend their time outside of the classroom. It is then the task of the instructor to isolate and judiciously incorporate relevant activities into the foreign language curriculum.

In an age where the use of CMC is becoming increasingly widespread, influences extending past the school context must undoubtedly include social media and internet use (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994). In her study, Mitchell (2016) supports this assertion stating, “Considering that these digital natives spend thousands of hours in the digital realm, it seems natural to tap into this interest in the foreign language classroom...” (p. 3). Although studies investigating the usefulness of CMC have been taking place for the better part of twenty years (Kern, 1995; Kern, Warschauer, & Ware, 2004; Magnan, 2007; Magnan 2009), studies concerning computer-assisted language learning (CALL), mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) technologies, and social media are fairly new (Borau et al., 2009; Chartrand,

2012; Mitchell, 2015). McBride (2009) shares another rationale for the use of what she terms social networking sites in the foreign language classroom: the creation of one's L2 identity. In her book chapter *Social-Networking Sites on Foreign Language Classes*, she states:

Acquiring an L2 is another experience that involves experimentation with and the development of new identities. This process often involves a stage where the learner experiences a loss, leaving behind one (L1) context and feeling forced to leave behind the sense of self that corresponded to that context (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). The virtual worlds of CMC, however, allow one to occupy multiple environments and experiment with multiple identities more safely because the experimentation takes place somewhere other than a single, monolithic real world. (Sykes et al., 2008, p. 39)

McBride (2009) continues by asserting that this compartmentalization to create outlets for different areas of one's life (posting on both professional and personal accounts, for example), is healthy. In this respect, the platform Instagram lends itself particularly well to the sort of social experimentation to which McBride is referring. Social networking platforms could prove useful in promoting the exploration of a new identity as an L2 user. This exploration of multiple identities on social networking sites could also aid in the mental projection of one's ideal L2 self, which has been shown to result in increased motivation (Dörnyei, 2015). Similar to previous research completed on Web 2.0, social media studies have tended to focus on intermediate and advanced learners (Lomicka & Lord, 2012; Borau et al., 2009).

However McBride (2009) also brings to light several challenges in the implementation of social media, questioning whether interactions online are truly meaningful, and pointing out some potential pitfalls with respect to ethics and privacy on the part of both teacher and students. As an instructor maintaining a social media account for the benefit of students, it is imperative that images and words are chosen with the utmost care. She also notes that the presence of the teacher on social media could lead to conversations and interactions between teacher and student that may feel forced, or otherwise would not have taken place. However, the important role of the instructor as a guide and facilitator of communication is not to be dismissed. Instructor-maintained social media accounts could potentially serve as a means of encouragement and further scaffolding, supporting student language production outside of the classroom by showing them what a successful interaction can look like, and leaving words of encouragement for a job well done in the form of comments. Further research is needed to explore the complexities of student and teacher interactions in an online environment.

In their 2012 study, Lomicka and Lord explored using Twitter in an intermediate French course with the goal of fostering a sense of community amongst students and to extend opportunities for learning outside of the classroom. When student tweets were analyzed and coded, results showed that 34.46% of all codes dealt with affective factors. Furthermore, the researchers concluded that Twitter was able to enhance the building of community that began in the classroom.

Overall, students reacted positively to the project, but lack of space was mentioned several times, as Twitter had a rather short word limit at that time. Furthermore, Lomicka and Lord call for longitudinal studies ranging two or more semesters in order to truly evaluate the effectiveness of Twitter on language learning. However, with the majority of students participating in CMC-related projects late in their studies, there is a need to explore how CMC could be incorporated curriculum-wide, specifically at beginning levels of instruction. A recent study by Kent (2016) compared and contrasted the use of both social media (Facebook) and the institution's Learning Management System (Blackboard) for Australian students completing degrees in Internet Communications. Findings showed that using social media not only increased student level of activity in online discussions, but also increased the likelihood that students would depart from the assignment requirements and engage in other communicative activities (ie. discussing assignments, administrative tasks, and additional material outside of the established learning content). Similarly, Schroeder and Greenbowe (2009) found that using Facebook to facilitate interactions between teachers and students brought about a 400% increase in students' online activity.

Although much attention has been paid to the possible benefits of CMC for intermediate and advanced level students who interact with members of the target community (Beauvois, 1998; Belz, 2002), there is a lack of similar investigations in beginning language courses. The positive effects of CMC, especially with regard to affective factors could increase motivation, and if implemented throughout a language curriculum, could give students much-needed real-world practice using the target language. Facebook and Twitter have largely dominated the literature in terms of language learning affordances. However, Özdemir (2017) points out that other online resources like the Facebook-owned Instagram warrant further investigation.

From a Vygotskian point of view, humans are unique in that we have the ability to utilize both physical tools and psychological tools like literacy to mediate our thinking. These intellectual activities can expand mental processes and transform people and their actions. It is in turn, the role of mediation that can explain how we learn to use tools to make these mental transformations, or internalization (Johnson, 2009). Internalization is neither automatic nor direct but rather happens as learners engage in social activities and receive cognitive assistance through dialogic mediation from expert others or more capable peers (Johnson & Dellagnelo, 2013). This space between what learners can achieve alone and with assistance is known as their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Lantolf (2000), in assessing previous interpretations on the ZPD, proposes that with the presence of the "key ingredient" of mediation, a more robust way of considering the ZPD can emerge to include interactions outside that of the expert/novice relationship. More specifically, he states "The ZPD then is more appropriately conceived of as the collaborative construction of opportunities" (p. 17), also referred to by Swain & Lapkin (1998) as "occasions for learning." Indeed, studies (e.g. Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001) have shown that learners working in collaboration can provide one another assistance that enables them to accomplish what none of them could have achieved independently. The co-construction of knowledge that takes place when using CMC and

social media could potentially offer more of these “occasions for learning” outside of the classroom, in an environment where social experimentation and collaboration already exist.

Indeed, one of the most important assumptions within sociocultural theory is that thinking is mediated with artifacts, or tools. Kozulin (2003) noted two distinct types of mediation: mediation through the use of “psychological tools” and “human mediation” in the form of developmentally appropriate assistance. Images, when considered as a psychological tool, could be yet another weapon in the student’s arsenal, allowing them to produce language with less assistance from an instructor. This idea is supported in the 2007 MLA Ad Hoc Committee report which called for the use of images to make language more meaningful (MLA Report, 2007). In communicative classrooms, the use of images to scaffold and support learner L2 comprehension is quite common (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001). Building on previous findings regarding chatrooms and language use (Meunier, 1994; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), the current study will add a third variable: images.

While a number of studies have investigated the use of synchronous CMC for more linguistically advanced students, the aforementioned advantages of asynchronous CMC for use in lower-level classrooms are worth exploring. Moreover, the chosen platform for the current study, Instagram could be useful, as it combines both text-based and audio-visual based modes by using images and captions. Given the positive findings of studies on other popular social media sites such as Pinterest, Facebook, or Twitter the current exploratory study examined the synergistic potential for pairing images and student writing in the target language. In short, there is a dearth of empirical literature focused on beginning learners, their assessment of the relevance of pedagogical tasks, and the central rather than peripheral role of images in computer-mediated environments. In light of these shortcomings in the current research base, the following questions will be addressed:

RQ1: Which factors influenced the topics that learners preferred to write about?

RQ2: How does image affect which postings learners chose to comment on?

RQ3: Do beginning learners perceive images to affect their ability to read and write discussion postings?

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were 83 learners enrolled in three second-semester French courses at a large research university in the southeastern United States. Over the course of one semester, students in all three classes participated in ten weekly online posts using the social media site Instagram. Each post was counted as a homework grade, which paired with other online assignments, comprised twenty percent of the students’ overall grade in the class. All classes followed the same curriculum and met twice a week for 75 minutes. One class was taught by the researcher, and the remaining two classes were taught by a colleague. The target language (French) was the main medium of instruction, although some explanations and/or clarifica-

tions were provided to students in English where appropriate. Pedagogical materials consisted of PowerPoint presentations created by the individual instructors, the textbook, *Vis à Vis* (Amon, Muyskens, & Omaggio-Hadley, 2015), and the ancillary online workbook program, *Connect*. The majority of participants were matriculated university students and native speakers of English. However, the study also included several dual-enrolled high school students and members of the university's program for senior citizens.

### *Instructional Materials*

Ten discussion prompts served as the primary materials for the study. The discussions were intended to allow participants to practice grammar structures and vocabulary introduced during class time and as such, the prompts closely related to the course content and timing. For example, the first chapter covered in this course contains the topic of food. Therefore the first two topics were centered on meals. Additional topics consisted of describing a typical weekend, discussing favorite places to go shopping, and sharing what they had done over the spring break. All structures and vocabulary were introduced before any related postings were due to ensure the students' familiarity with the necessary linguistic structures. A complete list of prompts used in the study can be found in Appendix A. Although English translations are given for the benefit of the reader, the prompt list that participants used was exclusively in French.

### *Procedures*

During the second week of the semester, students in all three classes were given detailed instructions for the discussion posts. These explained how to make an account and how to "follow" their instructor and classmates, which allowed them to see and comment on each other's postings. Prior to starting the project, roughly 50% of participants reported already having an account on Instagram. Those who used Instagram regularly for personal use did not require any additional instruction. Participants who were not familiar with Instagram could obtain extra support in the form of in-person tutorials given by their instructors. In this study, participants had the option to change the settings on their existing accounts to "public", or to create a dummy account for the purposes of the course if they wanted to maintain their privacy.

The instructors maintained administrative accounts to interact with each individual class; these were used to monitor and interact with participants, as well as to post model responses for the weekly prompts several days prior to each posting being due. Both instructors followed the assignment instructions to make a post with a minimum length of two complete sentences, with comments being at least one complete sentence. The instructor models were not only meant to serve as an example of excellent work, but also to provide rich and contextualized language input supported by a relevant image. The goal was to encourage learners to answer the writing prompts truthfully and to push the boundaries of their vocabulary use, rather than posting a false response simply because they were more familiar with certain words. Both instructors agreed to opt for a more personalized and authentic communication experience by posting real, undiluted answers to the discussion prompts, rather than using a controlled model across all three course sections. They



also replied to any comments directed to them by their students, and were generally free to interact with students as they saw fit. Given the exploratory nature of the current study, these interactions were not closely monitored. However, future studies could certainly consider the quality and number of student-teacher interactions during data analysis, especially in light of McBride's (2009) claim that learners may be uncomfortable engaging with their instructors in more informal or personal settings, such as on social media accounts.

The requirements for each post were to choose an image relevant to the prompt, write a minimum of two complete sentences, use the unique class hashtag, and to tag the instructor's administrative account. Participants were also asked to comment on at least two of their classmates' posts. However, given the large number of participants with no prior knowledge of Instagram, no comments were required for the first three postings to allow students time to adjust and become more comfortable with the platform. Comments were required on posts four through ten (weeks 3-12). The comments were required to be at least one complete sentence. Although shorter interactions such as "Cool!" and "Me too!" are considered to be authentic interactions on this medium and were not discouraged, learners were asked to compose thoughtful reactions to their classmates' postings that would further the conversation. For example, a post about a person's favorite food might elicit a comment such as, "There isn't any meat in this meal. Are you a vegetarian?"

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The primary data sources for this study were two surveys: one containing open-ended and multiple-choice questions, and another containing items on a Likert scale. The open-ended survey contained 14 questions overall. These questions were geared toward understanding participants' perceptions of the writing topics themselves, their overall feelings on the project, their feelings toward social media in general, and self-reports of their on-line behavior throughout the semester. For the open-ended survey, the analysis was centered on questions 1, 4, 5, and 6 dealing with student perception of the writing topics. Written responses were then transcribed and sorted into like themes. The Likert survey contained 16 statements on a scale of one to five, which dealt with a variety of constructs (L2 identity, community of practice, willingness to communicate, etc.). Numeric questions from the Likert survey were averaged in order to provide descriptive statistics. Of particular interest in this survey were questions 15 and 16, where participants shared their association between images and their writing.

## **Findings**

### *Image and Topic Preferences*

In order to respond to the first research question, learners ranked each writing prompt on a scale of one to ten, with one being their most favorite and ten being their least favorite. Table 1 shows the rankings for all ten posts in order from most popular to least popular.

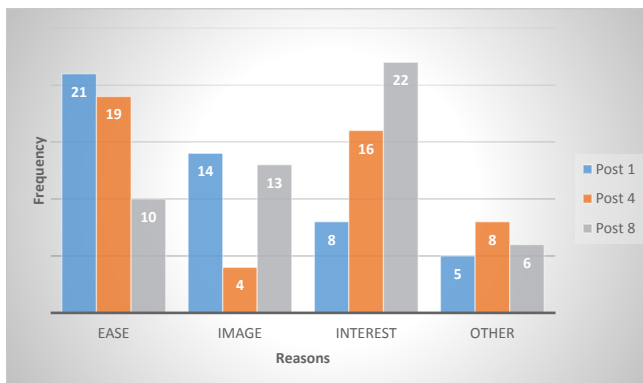


**Table 1.** Writing topics ranked from most popular to least popular

Post	Topic	Mean score
4	Weekend	4.000
1	Dinner	4.159
8	Spring break	4.159
2	Favorite meal	4.773
6	Sports	5.295
3	Shopping	5.386
7	Time/Weekend	5.773
10	French	6.647
5	Study	6.682
9	Vacation	7.341

Unsurprisingly, participants tended to favor topics that did not have to do with school, such as sharing how they spent their time during the weekend or during the spring break. Participants were least receptive to prompts concerning French studies and reported a low level of interest in discussing Francophone countries, study habits, and how to have fun in French. Likewise, posts that were linked to academics in general were not popular. In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of *why* participants perceived the topics in these ways, they were also asked to provide reasons for each post ranking via an open-ended comments section.

Figure 1 displays the reasons learners reported for liking the three most popular writing prompts.

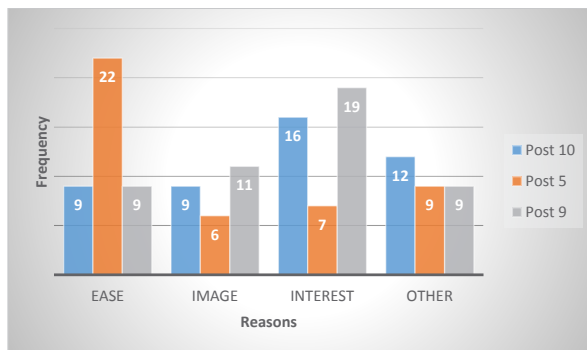
**Figure 1.** Reasons for top post ranking

For the two most popular topics, Post 4 (weekend) and Post 1 (dinner), the most widely cited reason was the overall ease in writing about this topic in French. For Post 8 (spring break), students most commonly stated their level of interest as the reason why they preferred this prompt. While image did appear to play a role in the popularity of Posts 1 and 8, it was not the strongest determining variable.

Figure 2 shows student-reported reasons for disliking the bottom three writ-

ing prompts. For Post 9 (vacation), the least popular topic, participants indicated that their level of interest in the topic affected their decision. Level of interest was also a contributing factor for the low popularity of Post 10 (French) as well. For Post 5 (study habits), learners stated that they did not find this topic easy to discuss, resulting in a low ranking. Again, image did not appear to play a large role in the popularity of these topics, with perceived difficulty and level of interest being the most impactful reasons.

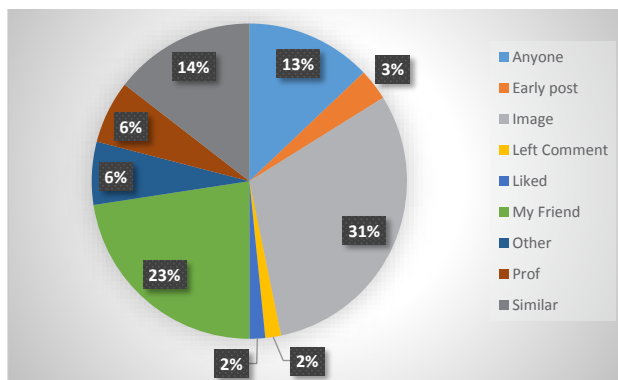
**Figure 2.** Reasons for bottom post ranking



### *Image and Reported Commenting Practices*

Also of interest was the ways in which image affected how learners interacted with each other during the commenting phase of the discussions. Findings from this survey question are provided below in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** Reasons for commenting



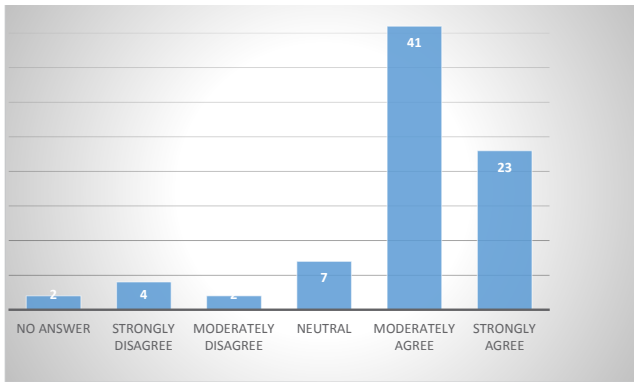
When asked to provide rationale for choosing to initiate interaction with one classmate over another, 31% of participants stated that image was the most important deciding factor. Other reasons included being familiar with the person in real life (23%), and having similar content (14%). In sum, participants were more likely to engage with a classmate if their image was interesting, if they were already on friendly terms with the person, and if the content of their classmates' post was similar to their own. Other participants reported that they chose anyone simply to fulfill the assignment requirements (13%). Less significant reasons for choosing to leave

a comment on a classmate's post included a preference for interacting with the instructor (6%), liking the content (6%), the timing of the person's post in relation to the deadline (3%), and feeling the need to reciprocate, or "return the favor" when a classmate commented on their own post (2%).

### *Image in Relation to Reading and Writing*

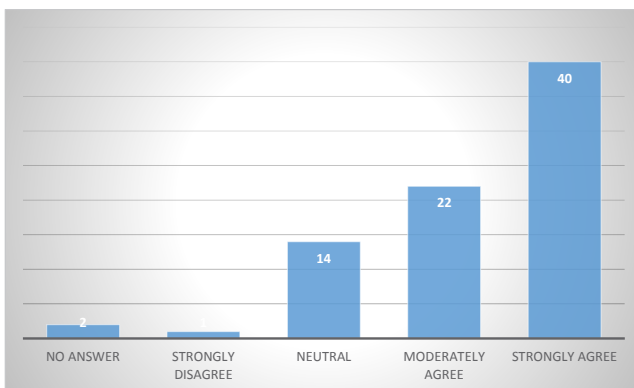
This study also concerned itself with beginning learners' perception of images and their role in reading comprehension and writing. Figure 4 shows findings from Likert survey data for reading comprehension.

**Figure 4.** Perceived effect of images on comprehension



In response to the statement "the images in Instagram helped me to understand what my classmates were saying, even if I didn't understand every word", the majority of learners chose "moderately agree" (41 out of 79 respondents) or "strongly agree" (23 out of 79 respondents). Similarly, for writing (see Figure 5), roughly 50% of participants strongly agreed with the statement "Including a picture or video in my post helped me to get my point across, even if I made mistakes in my writing or vocabulary." Another 28% of participants moderately agreed that image positively affected their writing.

**Figure 5.** Perceived effect of images on language production



Overall, the majority of participants in this study demonstrated the belief that images assisted in both their comprehension and ability to write the discussion postings in French.

## Discussion

### *Image and Topic Preferences*

The goal of the first research question was twofold: first, to determine which topics learners in this context preferred to write about and second, to better understand which factors affected these preferences. This information is essential in informing future implementations of online discussions. This step responds directly to Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini, and Ratcheva's (2013) assertion that subject matter be relevant to learners' daily lives. Additionally, authentic use of the platform was a concern. As McBride (2009) warned in her exposition of some of the pitfalls of using social media for educational purposes, inauthentic use of online resources can lead to forced, uncomfortable interactions that would not otherwise occur. This study allowed the participants themselves to appraise the pedagogical materials to determine which prompts were most engaging.

Rather predictably, topics that were unrelated to school and academic life were judged to be the most interesting. On one hand, the finding that learners prefer to discuss things that they find personally interesting and easy to write about is not particularly revolutionary. On the other hand, these findings do reinforce the benefits of conducting a needs analysis to identify target tasks and topics which learners believe to have real-world applications (Long & Crookes, 1992), and involving learners in topic selection when feasible, as research has shown that learners are more likely to engage in meaningful communication when they can relate to the topic on a personal level (Clément et al., 1994; Dörnyei, 1994; Moskovsky et al., 2013). Participants also felt that the ease with which they could respond to a prompt was important. If they did not feel that they possessed the necessary linguistic resources to respond, they were more likely to rate a particular topic unfavorably. Consequently, the importance of class time to scaffold interactions and reinforce necessary vocabulary and structures cannot be overstated. Although social interaction and images may assist in mediating learners' thoughts, they may be seen as supplements to well-planned instruction, rather than replacements. This includes both the introduction of linguistic resources via meaning-based instruction as well as coaching learners on how to find appropriate resources on their own.

Learners also perceived images as playing a large role in which topic they enjoyed writing about. In addition, many learners who indicated "level of interest" also mentioned images in the comments section, meaning that they were more likely to enjoy writing a post if they had an image they were eager to share. Similarly, learners wrote that they disliked topics for which they felt they did not have an interesting photo. One participant explained that for Post 5, which dealt with studying for an upcoming test, a lack of diversity in images caused the assignment to be less interesting. To reiterate, it was not simply the presence of images that learners found important, but the presence of *attractive*, *diverse*, and *relevant* images. In sum, successful discussion topics on Instagram appear to need several characteristics. First, learners

will have a positive perception of the topic and believe that their peers will find their contribution interesting. Second, learners must have an image or video that they wish to share. Finally and arguably most importantly, learners must be empowered to seek out the necessary linguistic resources in order to compose their response. It is possible that these criteria are also necessary for the creation of an online identity in the L2 that learners are satisfied with (McBride, 2009), and for the projection of their ideal L2 selves (Dörnyei, 2015).

### *Image and Reported Commenting Practices*

The second research question sought to understand how images affected social interaction with classmates. Participants' self-reported reasons for commenting on their classmate's postings revealed that image was an important factor in choosing who they engaged with. Most commonly cited reasons for reaching out to a classmate included "interesting picture", "similar picture to my own", or "picture that I could relate to." It seems then, that many learners scrolled through their classmates' posts looking for an image that caught their attention, at which point they would decide whether to leave a comment. In this case, the presence of images rather than plain text seems to have encouraged more interaction via comments, creating more "occasions for learning" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998) outside of class time. Through composing their posts, participants created opportunities for engagement and learning, with images serving a dual purpose of drawing attention to these learning opportunities and supporting comprehension. It may be that participants used the images accompanying their classmates' writing as a litmus test for whether they possessed the necessary language to respond. Future research, possibly focusing on participant interviews is needed to delve further into L2 learners' habits when interacting on social media.

Apart from image, another factor that influenced participants' decisions to interact with someone was whether or not that person wrote the same things or similar things as them. For example, one student wrote, "I commented on my professor's posts because she had similar interests to mine (dogs, reading, not exercising)." Another student wrote, "I commented on posts I could relate to like wanting to do yoga or actually going to France." This shows a propensity to find and have exchanges with like-minded individuals, rather than making comparisons with students who posted something drastically different than them.

Students also reported that their level of familiarity with a person in real life influenced their decisions. Students had the possibility of interacting with students across all three participating French classes, and yet they most often chose to have conversations with their real-life friends or people who sat next to them in class. One student replied that "I comment most to the people in my class that I'm actually friends with because it made me feel more comfortable than posting on a stranger's feed." Similarly, another participant stated that they commented most to "classmates who sit near me because I know them more." This finding corroborates McBride's (2009) assertion that social media users generally use the platform to learn more about people that they have already met in real life, rather than interacting with total strangers. Lomicka and Lord (2012) also found that using Twitter appeared to advance the sense of community that students had already begun to build in the classroom. Instagram thus may have had a similar effect in this context, with learners

preferring to continue interactions with their classmates and the social relationships in which they already had a vested interest, instead of branching out to interact with new people. It could also be that learners habitually return to converse with their familiars because they have already had at least one successful interaction with that individual in-person. Successful (or unsuccessful) in-person peer mediation as defined by Lantolf (2000) might have had an influence on learners' interactional behavior online. In asynchronous communication where users receive a delayed response and lack the ability for immediate negotiation of meaning, learners may strategically choose interactional partners based on whether they have achieved understanding in person. However, additional data would be needed to support this idea.

### *Image in Relation to Reading and Writing*

The final research question dealt with learners' beliefs about images and their effect on reading and writing. In response to the following statement, "Including a picture or video in my post helped me to get my point across, even if I made mistakes in my writing or vocabulary", 40 out of 79 students marked "strongly agree" and 22 students marked "moderately agree." It is clear that the majority of students participating in this project reported relying on images both as a psychological tool to aid in their comprehension of their classmates' posts, in addition to scaffolding their own L2 production and their classmates' subsequent comprehension of what they had written. It would appear as though student writing, when accompanied with a corresponding image, rendered L2 writing more meaningful and provided scaffolding for learner L2 writing. Given educators' concerns with student engagement and supporting learning outside of the classroom, allowing beginning language learners to choose an image on which to base their writing holds the potential to increase confidence, motivation, and could possibly decrease anxiety around lack of vocabulary or fluency.

Similarly, for the statement "The images in Instagram helped me to understand what my classmates were saying, even if I didn't know every word", 41 out of 79 students chose "moderately agree", and 23 students chose "strongly agree." This finding indicates that students believed the images that their classmates chose supported their understanding of their written response, suggesting that images may have served as a sort of psychological tool to support understanding in the absence of another person (Kozulin, 2003). In this case, images appeared to act as a mediational tool (Kozulin, 2003) in two ways: first, participants in the study used images as a foundation on which to build their written responses. Second, participants appear to have used the contextual information that images provided to mediate their reading comprehension when their vocabulary or grammar knowledge may not have been adequate. Furthermore, being attracted to an image and having a basic understanding of the ideas being expressed might empower learners to reach out to their peers and ask more specific questions to solidify their comprehension. This peer mediation could in turn, lead to the internalization of specific vocabulary words, fixed expressions, or structures (Kozulin, 2003; Lantolf, 2000). To conclude, the inclusion of images could encourage learners to seek peer assistance outside of class time, allowing for the development of collective knowledge and strengthening of social networks with less intervention from the instructor (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001).

As a final point, the findings of this study warrant an important caveat about CMC, and social media in particular. While some may view such social exercises as a silver bullet to issues with student engagement and motivation, learner responses from this study suggest that this is not the case. As seen in the above discussion, ease in responding (e.g. the availability of the necessary linguistic resources), the nature of relationships that are first fostered in the language classroom, and the relevance of specific topics to learners' lives are all crucial for success in implementing a CMC component to an existing course.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

In terms of pedagogy, Instagram as a means of using images to support student writing at beginning levels shows promise, although more research is needed to understand exactly how images on this medium and others like it affect L2 writing and reading development. Data from this exploratory study show that learners generally believed there was a positive relationship between images and their level of interest in a topic, how they interacted with their classmates, their comprehension of written posts, and in classmate comprehension of their own posts as well. This could be useful in beginning language classrooms as students build confidence in their writing and develop skills for interacting and sharing opinions with others. Furthermore, using a platform where images are an inherent part of interaction may increase learners' engagement, creating more opportunities to learn from and interact with peers within the ZPD. Images could also be considered as a psychological tool to mediate learners' thinking, assisting them in understanding the messages of their peers, and in composing their own messages by allowing them to visualize an object or activity that they are describing.

While the pedagogical focus for prompts in the current study was centered on grammatical structures, future studies will reduce the number of required postings, operating on thematic units to examine whether this results in higher amounts of language production and a more even student reception to the writing topics themselves. Instructors considering implementing such writing prompts in their own teaching contexts would do well to conduct a needs analysis prior to deciding on topics, as interests and appropriateness of certain prompts will vary. Prompts could also contain a set of guiding questions in order to further scaffold student language production. These changes could result in a more equitable rating of student interest in the topics, allowing for exploration on the influence of the images and the medium itself with regard to student motivation and willingness to communicate with peers. With respect to language use and the use of additional resources, there are also recommendations to be made. Learners in this study often confessed to using online translation software if the textbook or class notes did not contain an idea they wished to express. Therefore an introduction to available online resources such as online dictionaries, verb conjugators, and learner corpora may increase learner autonomy in this area. Of equal importance is guidance on how to use these resources judiciously, choosing to use new vocabulary and structures based on *context* and *cultural appropriateness*, an area where many online translators fall short.

Logistically speaking, there are several suggestions which could facilitate the use of social media in the classroom. First, privacy and sharing preferences proved

to be an important issue with participants, and allowing the choice to use personal accounts or create a dummy account did not appear to be sufficient. The creation of a private account could be required of all learners in order to alleviate concerns of student privacy violations. This could also serve to separate learners' personal online identities, which may already be well-established, from their identities as language learners (McBride, 2009). It is worth mentioning that while the majority of learners viewed the exercises as beneficial, several participants who already held negative views about social media chose not to participate in one or both aspects of the project despite the fact that it impacted their grade in the course. In university settings like the one where this study was conducted, instructors may wish to survey their students in order to weigh the potential benefits to using social media against using existing learning platforms such as online course management websites. More research is needed to determine the learning affordances of similar writing activities across multiple platforms, and it may be that learners in some contexts would prefer the convenience of using other more "academic" learning platforms.

With respect to due dates, the postings and commenting could be separated into two phases, allowing students first to compose their own postings, then allowing for extra time to comment. This step could counteract the effects of procrastination, as many participants in the present study waited until the last minute to write their posts, leaving little time for social interaction. Comments on the open-ended survey showed that although students reached out to their peers and asked questions via comments, many were frustrated that they did not receive a response after the deadline had passed. Creating two separate deadlines could possibly facilitate deeper, more meaningful interaction.

Another consideration is that of social relationships between participants. In the current study, all participants were adults who possessed the maturity to openly discuss and embrace the importance of supportive, constructive interactions in an online environment. Here, the role of the instructor as a moderator is especially important. In this study there were no reported cases of abuse of the platform, or hurtful messages occurring publically in the comments section or privately via messaging. However, the possibility of cyber bullying is certainly present, especially in settings with younger learners. Additionally, some research on CMC has suggested that on-line interactions can serve as an extension of classroom interactions (Lomicka & Lord, 2012), meaning that it is imperative to consider how students respond to one another in class and how this dynamic may carry over into communication on other media such as Instagram.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Based on student surveys, overall reception to the project was positive. However, the exploratory nature of the project resulted in a rather limited scope. As such, many of the limitations of this study have implications for future projects. First, without a pre-assignment questionnaire to match the Likert questionnaire administered at the end of the project, it was not possible to ascertain whether any changes in affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, or L2 identity were statistically significant. Additionally, change in student attitudes and motivation over time was not evaluated. This was largely due to the fact that the researcher was an instructor for



one of the three classes. Great care was taken to collect and analyze the data in an ethically sound manner, which led to the students' responses being anonymous. This resulted in a lack of demographic information, which could have yielded more valuable information. Ideally, all three conditions would have had the same instructor to reduce variability in teaching style, the introduction of and use of pedagogical materials, and online interaction frequency and style. It is possible that instructor engagement on the platforms differed greatly, influencing the participants' post length and frequency of interaction. Although practical considerations in the teaching context precluded such tightly controlled conditions, future studies could more closely evaluate the role of the teacher and/or researcher as they could have an impact on the findings. Future studies could also track learners' affective factors over time, such as motivation, willingness to communicate, and anxiety, as well as learner agency and the development of L2 identity (MacIntyre and Blackie, 2012; McBride, 2009).

With regard to time, data collection for this project spanned only one semester. As Lomicka and Lord (2012) have stated, there is a real need for longitudinal studies spanning at least two semesters, if not longer. On that same token, much research looks at the implementation of CMC within the confines of one course or one proficiency level. We should also aim to have a wider scope, evaluating how these online activities can be compounded and sequenced as part of the larger language curriculum to maximize student learning. Finally, although self-reported, qualitative data are useful in the initial stages of investigating a new area, future studies could go beyond these exploratory measures and evaluate actual language production in relation to images. Another possibility is to create experimental conditions using multiple platforms and modalities to better understand how learners use images in both the L2 writing and reading processes.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, this exploratory study set out to gauge the perception of beginning-intermediate French learners' towards completing online discussions on the social media site Instagram. Findings indicated that participants in three intact classrooms positively perceived the project overall, but that further refinement of discussion topics based on the needs and interests of learners in each specific context is warranted. Additionally, the presence of an image along with written responses was deemed to be important in several ways. Many learners chose which of their classmates to interact with based on the photos they shared. Finally, the majority of participants stated that images were beneficial for comprehending their classmates' writing, and in making up for shortcomings in their own writing. Future research investigating online platforms such as Instagram which allow learners, especially beginners, to use images to support L2 writing and reading processes is warranted.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A. Project assignment schedule

Post	Topic	Prompt	English Translation
1	Dinner	Que mangez-vous ce soir ?	What are you eating tonight?
2	Favorite meal	Décrivez votre plat préféré. Quels sont les ingrédients ?	Describe your favorite meal. What are the ingredients?
3	Shopping	Quel est votre magasin préféré ? (type de magasin, qu'achetez-vous, combien ça coûte ?)	What is your favorite store? (type of store, what you buy, how much it costs...)
4	Weekend	Qu'avez-vous fait ce weekend ?	What did you do this weekend?
5	Study	Qu'avez-vous révisé en priorité pour l'examen ?	What did you study most for the test?
6	Sports	Quel sport avez-vous fait ce weekend ?	What sport did you play this weekend?
7	Time/Weekend	A quelle heure avez-vous dormi samedi ? Etes-vous sorti ?	Until what time did you sleep on Saturday? Did you go out?
8	Spring break	Qu'avez-vous fait pendant les vacances de printemps ?	What did you do during spring break?
9	French	Que faut-il faire pour s'amuser en français ? (restaurant, film, activité, culture...)	What is necessary to have fun in French? (restaurant, film, activity, culture...)
10	Vacation	Parlez d'un pays franco-phone que vous voulez visiter.	Talk about a franco-phone country you would like to visit.

# Teaching Grammatical Terminology: A Content Analysis of Popular French Textbooks

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## Abstract

*Even in this digital age, as educational technologies are increasingly integrated into teaching and learning, textbooks continue to play a significant role within language classrooms. Many textbooks maintain a traditional approach to presenting grammar, including using grammatical terminology. However, students seem to have little knowledge of these terms, which may make grammar explanations difficult to comprehend. This investigation examines data from eight widely-used beginning-level French textbooks to investigate how grammatical terminology is employed. The findings confirm that grammar explanations in beginning-level French textbooks feature a large number of grammatical terms and many of these terms are not defined. An instructional approach that allows for the use of a simplified set of grammatical terminology is proposed.*

**Key words:** French, grammar, materials development, second language education, terminology

## Background

Grammar instruction has played a vital role in classroom second language teaching for many years. This tradition has been maintained and is apparent in the grammar explanations that are present in many of the foreign language textbooks used in language classrooms today. Many language textbooks have upheld a traditional approach to presenting grammar, including using metalinguistic, or grammatical, terminology in explaining grammatical features of the target language. However, it appears that students in the United States are entering language classrooms with little or no knowledge of the meaning of these terms (Clifton, 2013; Vande Berg, 1999), which may make these grammar explanations difficult to comprehend. Thus, this paper examines how grammar is presented in first-year language textbooks and the extent to which those presentations are well defined for student comprehension.

## The Utility of Grammatical Terms

Previous studies on second language grammar instruction have revealed disagreement over how necessary grammatical terminology is to second language teaching. Some studies have made a case against employing grammatical terminology in second language education. For example, Mohammed (1996) argues that these grammatical terms simply encumber the learning process because students must be familiar with the terminology in order to understand the grammar rules that will then help them to practice and learn the language. In this way, learning becomes a

three-step process: (1) learn the meanings of the grammar terms, (2) learn the grammar rules, (3) apply those rules in order to communicate in the language. Mohamed concludes that informal pedagogical grammar may be the most effective form of grammar instruction because in this approach, grammar is reduced in scope and is explained using a minimum of grammatical terms. Bourke (2005) identified six criteria of effective pedagogical grammar, including clarity, which he defines as being characterized by “explaining and exemplifying in plain English and not obfuscating by unfamiliar metalanguage” (p. 85).

Another argument against using grammatical terms in second language teaching is situated in the question of the relationship between awareness of a rule and the capacity to use it in production. Stephen Krashen (1985), for example, rejected the idea that explicit knowledge of grammar rules increases second language fluency. This view is known as the ‘non-interface position’ and states that learned language rules do not become the acquired language rules that lead to fluency. With the growth in popularity of communicative and proficiency-oriented approaches to language learning and teaching, which stress the importance of being able to use the target language to communicate in authentic contexts and to produce spontaneous output (Brumfit, 1984; Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Savignon, 1997), questions were raised concerning the importance of explicit grammar instruction and terminology use in the foreign language classroom.

However, many scholars support the use of grammatical terms in second language learning and teaching. Berry (2008), for example, argues that grammatical terminology is important because it provides learners and teachers with a quick and easy way to denote grammatical elements: “There will be situations where terminology is not appropriate, as with less advanced, younger or less mature students, but if the classroom focus is on form it appears to be an essential shorthand” (p. 20). Although acknowledging that the use of metalanguage is not suitable for all language learning contexts, Berry nevertheless maintains that grammatical terminology offers a simple way for instructors and students to communicate about language when students’ attention is directed to language form. In addition, Carreira (2016) contends that being familiar with a foreign language involves being familiar with the terms used to describe it: “In the foreign languages, disciplinary literacy includes knowledge of grammatical terminology” (p. 163). For Carreira, then, language study also encompasses a familiarity with metalanguage.

Research on grammatical terminology (Berry, 2009; Elder & Manwaring, 2004) has also uncovered positive correlations between familiarity with terminology and second language proficiency. Indeed, contrary to the view espoused by Krashen (1985, 1993) that form-focused instruction is capable of contributing only to learned, explicit knowledge, Ellis (2002) offers evidence that form-focused instruction contributes to both learned and acquired knowledge. Ellis concludes that the noticing of target structures plays a central role in second language learning by affecting both explicit and implicit knowledge. Many authors agree that grammar instruction and the development of grammatical competency can help to develop students’ language skills and communicative competence. Haight, Herron, and Cole (2007) suggest that grammar instruction that directs learners’ attention to form is most successful: “In general, research suggests that focusing on form in a communicative language class-

room is a more effective technique for teaching grammar than focusing on form alone or focusing purely on communication” (p. 290). Thus, instruction that directs learners’ attention to form can lead to an increase in grammatical proficiency.

### **Grammatical Terms in Language Textbooks**

One of the functions of beginning language textbooks is to present vocabulary terms and grammatical constructions with the aim of improving learners’ language proficiency. Learning the language rules that beginning language students must come to know to be able to converse in a second language is a difficult task. This undertaking becomes problematic when students are unfamiliar with the grammatical terminology used in their textbooks. Consequently, this paper focuses on how grammar is presented in textbooks because these materials have the potential to encourage or hinder language learning. Specifically, do beginning language textbooks employ grammatical terminology in presenting grammar? The purpose of this investigation is to explore the way in which grammatical terminology is presently used in textbooks. This paper will examine the terminology used in the grammar presentations concerning the French relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* provided by eight different introductory French language textbooks.

The present study examines the following questions in the content analysis of textbooks:

1. Do the eight beginning level French textbooks surveyed use grammatical terminology to explain grammatical language features? If so, how many grammatical terms are used in a given explanation?
2. Which grammatical terms are used?
3. Do the textbooks provide explanations as to the meaning of these terms?

### **Textbook Analysis**

Eight widely-used US French texts were chosen for the content analysis. The textbooks examined were *Chez Nous* (Valdman, Pons, & Scullen, 2006), *Contacts* (Valette & Valette, 2009), *Deux Mondes* (Terrell, Rogers, Kerr, & Spielmann, 2005), *Entre Amis* (Oates & Oukada, 2006), *Horizons* (Manley, Smith, McMinn, & Prévost, 2006), *Mais oui* (Thompson & Phillips, 2011), *Motifs* (Jansma & Kassen, 2011), and *Vis-à-vis* (Amon, Muyskens, & Omaggio Hadley, 2011). Following Fernández (2011), the choice of textbooks was determined by how many editions of the books had been produced. Textbooks with several editions are generally more well-known and more widely-used by language educators than textbooks that have undergone only one printing. For this reason, only books in their fourth edition or above were chosen for the content analysis. Finally, all textbooks chosen for analysis were published by major publishing companies (Heinle-Cengage, Houghton Mifflin, McGraw-Hill, Pearson-Prentice Hall, and Thomson-Heinle).

The grammar presentations concerning the French relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* provided by these eight textbooks were examined for the content analysis. These presentations were chosen for two reasons. First, relative pronouns are a grammatical feature of French that is introduced in the beginning and intermediate levels.



Second, a brief evaluation of the first-year French textbooks established that the explanations of relative pronouns tended to be typical of explanations of other grammatical targets in terms of the number of grammatical terms included in the explanations. The goal of the content analysis was to examine (1) the amount and (2) the type of grammatical terminology contained in the presentation of a target linguistic form (i.e., relative pronouns) and (3) the degree to which these terms are explained in the presentation. The analysis is based on careful inspection of a corpus of the presentations on relative pronouns in eight first-year French textbooks. The major focus here is to review the grammatical terms as they are used and defined in the explanations on relative pronouns. Definitions provided in a glossary are noted when applicable.

The first textbook chosen for analysis was *Chez Nous*, an introductory French textbook published in 2006 by Pearson Education. *Chez Nous* provides deductive grammar instruction by presenting students with explanations of essential French grammatical concepts. The grammar is presented in English with examples given in French. Activities are included after the grammar explanation in which students advance from “skill-developing to skill-using activities” (Valdman et al., 2006, p. xi). That is, students begin with several form-focused practice exercises and then proceed to activities that are increasingly meaning-focused, thereby integrating the development of communicative competence.

In its presentation of the relative pronouns *qui* and *que*, the text employs several grammar terms. For example, the presentation of the relative pronoun *qui* begins by explaining: “Relative pronouns allow you to introduce a clause that provides additional information about a person, place or thing. When the relative pronoun **qui**, equivalent to the English *who* or *which/that*, is used to introduce this information, it is always followed by a verb” (Valdman et al., 2006, p. 369). This explanation provides a functional description of the relative pronoun. The book then provides two example sentences with the relative pronoun *qui* highlighted in boldface. While the book does employ techniques such as these to draw students’ attention to important concepts, it never defines the terms *clause* and *verb* in its presentation of relative pronouns.

The explanation of the relative pronoun *que* offered in *Chez Nous* differs from the book’s presentation of the relative pronoun *qui* in terms of the number of grammar terms present in the explanation. The longer description of the relative pronoun *que* begins with a general review of the function of relative pronouns: “The relative pronoun connects the clause that provides additional information to the main clause. In the example below, the clause that provides additional information, called the subordinate clause, is set off by brackets” (Valdman et al., 2006, p. 370). The book then supplies the example, first as two independent clauses and then as a complex sentence containing a relative pronoun. The relative pronoun is printed in boldface and the subordinate clause displayed within brackets. In this explanation, the textbook employs twelve grammatical terms: *relative pronoun*, *clause*, *main clause*, *subordinate clause*, *subject*, *verb phrase*, *direct object*, *past participle*, *number*, *gender*, *direct-object pronoun*, and *noun*.

In *Contacts*, a textbook designed for use in first-year French classes, grammatical patterns and rules are presented explicitly and are textually enhanced using bold text, text boxes, color-coding, italicized text, and text in uppercase to help students more easily identify important features of the language. The grammar is presented in Eng-

lish with examples given in French and English. For practice, *Contacts* includes various conversational activities from directed exercises to more open communication.

The book's discussion of the relative pronoun *qui* includes nine grammatical terms: *relative clause*, *clause*, *relative pronoun*, *pronoun*, *antecedent*, *noun*, *subject pronoun*, *subject*, and *verb*. In the lesson itself, there is an explanation of the meaning of three of these terms: *relative clause*, *relative pronoun*, and *antecedent*. The lesson begins with a *Note linguistique*, providing definitions for the three aforementioned terms, all of which appear throughout the lesson. However, these definitions include grammatical terms that are not explained within the lesson: *clause*, *pronoun*, and *noun*. For example, the textbook defines a relative clause as "...a clause that is introduced by a relative pronoun..." (Valette & Valette, 2009, p. 344). This definition succeeds in explaining that a relative clause begins with a relative pronoun, but fails to explain the meaning of the term *clause*.

Below the *Note linguistique*, examples are provided, and students are asked to observe the way in which two example sentences can be combined into one using the relative pronoun *qui*. The examples of the relative pronoun and its antecedent are highlighted in boldface: "J'ai **des amis**. **Ils** habitent à Paris. → J'ai des amis **qui** habitent à Paris" (Valette & Valette, 2009, p. 344). The grammar explanation then resumes, stating: "The RELATIVE PRONOUN **qui** (*who, that, which*) is a SUBJECT pronoun" (p. 344). This explanation differs from the one offered in *Chez Nous*, as it serves to distinguish between the relative pronouns *qui* and *que* by describing the grammatical function of the pronoun within the clause. However, this description does not explain the meaning of the term *subject pronoun*. In fact, of the nine grammatical terms introduced, only three are defined in the lesson: *relative clause*, *relative pronoun*, and *antecedent*.

The book's presentation of the relative pronoun *que* follows a similar format, using a total of eleven grammatical terms in its explanation: *relative pronoun*, *direct-object pronoun*, *direct object*, *verb*, *direct-object relative pronoun*, *pronoun*, *relative clause*, *past participle*, *gender*, *number*, and *antecedent*. Apart from the three terms defined prior to the lesson on the relative pronoun *qui*, none of the additional terminology is defined in the presentation.

The introduction to the beginning-level French textbook, *Deux Mondes*, states that the book follows a communicative approach. According to the authors, the textbook offers opportunities for students to expand their ability to communicate through "guided and free conversation, interviews, information gap activities, role-plays, writing, and other kinds of activities that are theme-based, not grammar-driven" (Terrell et al., 2005, p. xi). Although the text maintains the structural syllabus as a general organizing principle, the grammar presentations and self-study exercises are provided as a means to reinforce the development of students' ability to communicate in French. Grammar is presented explicitly and in English with accompanying examples in both French and English. The grammar explanations are intended to be easy to understand so that students can study the grammar individually, outside of class.

In this text, fewer grammatical terms are employed as compared to the other textbooks examined, but explanations as to the meaning of those terms are still lacking. The text employs a total of eight grammatical terms in its presentation of the relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont*: *relative pronoun*, *noun*, *subject*, *verb*, *direct ob-*

*ject*, *preposition*, *relative clause*, and *possessive (construction)*. However, of the eight terms used in the grammar presentations, only the term *relative pronoun* is defined as part of the explanation. For example, in a description of the grammatical function of the relative pronoun *qui*, the book states: “**Qui** is used when the preceding noun is the *subject* of the following verb” (Terrell et al., 2005, p. 217). Although two examples are provided to illustrate this concept, the text makes use of the terms *noun*, *subject*, and *verb* without explaining their meaning in the lesson. The explanation of the grammatical function of the relative pronoun *que* is similar: “**Que** is used when the preceding noun is the *direct object* of the following verb” (Terrell et al., 2005, p. 218). These definitions describe the relative pronouns by referring to their grammatical function within a relative clause. The distinction between the grammatical function of the relative pronouns *qui* and *que* is critical, yet there are no definitions provided for the terms *subject* and *direct object* in these explanations.

The beginning French textbook *Entre Amis* aims to provide learners with opportunities to develop their communicative ability in the course of meaningful interaction with others. Each of the grammar explanations contained in the textbook provides an explicit presentation of the grammar in English as well as several examples in French and English of the grammatical structure in question. Practice exercises are found at the end of each lesson and range from exercises that center on simply manipulating a particular grammatical feature to exercises that focus on both grammar and meaning. This textbook also contains a glossary of grammatical terms employed in each of the grammar presentations. Included in each glossary entry is a grammatical term in French along with its English equivalent and the page numbers on which the term is used, a definition of the term in English, and a number of examples of the structure in French.

The relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* are introduced explicitly in Chapter 9, and the lesson is reviewed and expanded in Chapter 14. The lesson offered in *Entre Amis* makes use of a small number of grammatical terms, relative to the number of terms used in many of the other texts surveyed. Among those used in the lesson are the terms *relative pronoun*, *clause*, *subject*, *object*, *relative clause*, *preposition*, *past participle*, and *direct object*. Similar to *Contacts* and *Deux Mondes*, the lesson starts with a brief description of the grammatical role of relative pronouns within a sentence: “Relative pronouns like *who*, *whom*, *which*, and *that* relate or tie two clauses together. They refer to a word in the first clause” (Oates & Oukada, 2006, p. 260). The book then provides two sets of example sentences combined into single sentences with the relative pronouns *qui* and *que*. Contrary to the other textbooks examined, of the eight grammatical terms used in the lesson, five of those terms are defined, either in the lesson itself or the glossary of grammatical terms: *relative pronoun*, *subject*, *preposition*, *past participle*, and *direct object*. Only the terms *clause*, *object*, and *relative clause* lack definitions.

The introductory French textbook, *Horizons*, introduces vocabulary and grammar appropriate to the particular functions of the language contained in each chapter. In each grammar lesson, *Pour vérifier* sections give learners the opportunity to test their understanding of new structures. In addition, *Résumé de grammaire* segments at the end of each chapter present a review of the grammar contained in the chapter. The reviews offer definitions, language examples, and explicit grammar rules. Prac-

tice activities begin with controlled tasks designed to help students identify how the language feature in question works and then move to less-controlled tasks that ask students to use the language creatively.

*Horizons* provides an explicit presentation of the French relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* with illustrative examples. The lesson begins with an explanation of the function of relative pronouns along with a few brief definitions of some of the terms used throughout: *relative clause* and *relative pronoun*. The description opens: “Sometimes you need to use a whole phrase to clarify which person or object you are talking about. The phrase that describes the noun is the relative clause. The word that begins the phrase, referring back to the noun described, is a relative pronoun” (Manley et al., 2006, p. 288). This explanation offers some information concerning both the usage and the grammatical function of relative pronouns in French. Note that the book offers an explanation of the terms *relative clause* and *relative pronoun*. Following this description, one example sentence is given for each of the three relative pronouns. Each of the relative pronouns is highlighted in boldface and the relative clauses are set apart from the main clause by a bracket. The lesson continues in this format, providing grammatical rules followed by examples. Although the book begins with definitions of two important terms used frequently throughout the lesson, it does not provide an explanation or review of the other terms used within the lesson itself: *subject*, *verb*, *direct object*, *preposition*, *object*, *noun*, *past participle*, *pronoun*, *number*, and *gender*.

*Mais Oui!* uses an inductive approach to grammar. The text employs a carefully sequenced series of tasks entitled *Observez et déduisez* and *Confirmez* in order to guide learners to discover the grammar and how to use the language for themselves. In this approach, learners are invited to consider examples of the language and then figure out the grammatical rules that govern those language samples. The authors explain that the grammar lessons are “designed to engage students’ critical thinking and to teach them to predict meaning, form, and function by responding to specific questions and hypothesizing about language samples” (Thompson & Phillips, 2011, p. AIE-9). The *Observez et déduisez* segments include a brief, authentic reading followed by questions designed to focus learners’ attention on particular grammatical forms in the reading. The *Confirmez* segments clarify the rules governing these forms and offer examples. The grammar lessons end with a variety of both controlled and more open-ended exercises.

The lesson concerning the relative pronouns *qui* and *que* follows the inductive approach discussed above. First, contextualized examples of the relative pronouns are provided in the form of a short paragraph. Then the examples are followed by a few questions which ask learners to identify certain grammatical elements within the paragraph. Finally, a brief explanation of relative pronouns is provided. The amount of grammatical terminology used in the explanation is minimal, as is apparent in the lesson’s guiding questions: “In the preceding paragraph, what kind of word follows the pronoun **qui**: a subject or a verb? What kind of word follows the pronoun **que** (**qu**)?” (Thompson & Phillips, 2011, p. 287). The text employs a total of six terms in the lesson: *pronoun*, *subject*, *verb*, *relative pronoun*, *noun*, and *object*. However, as has been the tendency among the other first-year French textbooks examined, this book generally does not provide an explanation or a review of the meanings of the

grammatical terms in its grammar presentations. Specifically, the book defines the term *relative pronoun* by explaining both the usage and grammatical role of relative pronouns in French: “Relative pronouns are used to relate (link) two sentences and to avoid repetition...The pronoun **qui** is used as a *subject* and is usually followed directly by a verb...The pronoun **que** is an *object* and is followed by a subject *and* a verb” (Thompson & Phillips, 2011, p. 287). However, the text does not review the meaning of any of the other terms in the lesson.

The elementary French textbook *Motifs* splits its grammar component into two sections: the first section (*Thèmes and Pratiques de conversation*) is designed for practice in the classroom, with the second section (*Structures utiles*) designed to help students prepare the grammar outside of the classroom. *Structure* notes in the in-class component draw students’ attention to pertinent grammar and also guide them to the *Structures utiles* section, which presents the grammar along with examples and practice exercises. The *Activités* included in each *Thème* provide contextualized communicative practice, varying in format from controlled to open-ended, and afford students a variety of opportunities to communicate with one another. In this way, the text encourages interaction in French in the classroom and out-of-class reading of the grammar lessons.

In the in-class component, *Thème*, three grammatical terms (*relative pronoun*, *clause*, and *antecedent*) are employed, and two of these terms are defined in the lesson: “...relative pronouns...are used for joining clauses to form complex sentences... The words they replace are called their antecedents” (Jansma & Kassen, 2011, p. 233). In keeping with the text’s intended design, most of the in-class component is devoted to practice activities that encourage communication among students. In contrast, the out-of-class *Structures utiles* features explicit instruction of the relative pronouns *qui* and *que* along with more grammatical terms: *relative pronoun*, *clause*, *noun*, *antecedent*, *subject*, *verb*, and *direct object*. The lesson begins with general information about relative pronouns. Namely, the text comments on the function of relative pronouns and defines a number of important terms, including *relative pronoun*, *clause*, and *antecedent*: “Relative pronouns enable you to create complex sentences and avoid repetition by combining two sentences, or clauses. The noun referred to by a relative pronoun is called its antecedent (**antécédent**)” (Jansma & Kassen, 2011, p. 249). Then, the lesson examines each pronoun individually.

Two grammatical terms (*subject* and *verb*) are used in the book’s explanation of *qui*, but neither term is defined as part of the explanation. Although these terms are rather basic, the concepts they represent are crucial to understanding the difference between the relative pronouns *qui* and *que*. However, the explanation does offer two sets of examples with the subject and verb in each sentence labeled to demonstrate how two sentences can be joined with the relative pronoun *qui*. By labeling the relevant elements in the example sentences, the text helps to provide students with a visual representation of what the terms denote. The explanation of the relative pronoun *que* follows a similar format, using three terms (*direct object*, *subject*, and *verb*) in its description, and offering labeled examples to demonstrate the role of the relative pronoun.

The final textbook I examined for the content analysis is the beginning French textbook *Vis-à-vis*. This text focuses on developing students’ listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills in French. In this textbook, grammar presentations be-

gin with contextualized examples of the target structure in the form of grammar dialogues. Comprehension questions help to guide students through the reading of the dialogues and direct their attention to the target structure. Then, the book offers an explicit presentation of the grammar, using rules, examples, and charts. An array of exercises from form-focused to communicative gives students the opportunity to practice using the target structure. The book also contains a glossary of grammatical terminology, which acts as a supplement to the grammar lessons, and includes terms employed in those lessons. Each entry consists of a grammatical term in French, along with its English equivalent, a definition of the term, and two examples in French with English translations.

This text employs a number of grammatical terms in its lesson on relative pronouns: *relative pronoun*, *dependent (relative) clause*, *main clause*, *subject*, *conjugated verb*, *object pronoun*, *object*, *preposition*, *direct object*, *past participle*, *verb*, *possessive adjective*, and *definite article*. The explanation begins with a general presentation of the function of relative pronouns before moving on to more specific presentations for the pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont*. In its entirety, only two grammatical terms (*relative pronoun* and *dependent (relative) clause*) are defined in the lesson itself. For example, the explanation begins with the following statement: “A relative pronoun (*who*, *that*, *which*, *whom*, *whose*) links a dependent (relative) clause to a main clause. A dependent clause is one that cannot stand by itself – for example, the italicized parts of the following sentences: The suitcase *that he is carrying* is mine; There is the store *in which we met*” (Amon et al., 2011, p. 392). In this example, the book offers a definition of the terms *relative pronoun* and *dependent (relative) clause*, but does not define the term *main clause*. Although this term is defined in the book’s glossary, students may have difficulty locating it, as the term is used only in English in the lesson, but entered under its French form (*proposition principale*) in the glossary.

## Findings

Table 1 displays a summary of the grammatical terms used in the presentations of the French relative pronouns *qui*, *que*, and *dont* across the eight textbooks surveyed.

Table 1

### *Metalinguistic Terminology in the Grammar Explanations of Eight French Textbooks*

	<i>Chez Nous</i>	<i>Contacts</i>	<i>Deux Mondes</i>	<i>Entre Amis</i>	<i>Horizons</i>	<i>Mais Oui</i>	<i>Motifs</i>	<i>Vis-à-vis</i>
relative pronoun	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *	✓ *
subject	✓	✓	✓	✓ **	✓	✓	✓	✓ **
direct object	✓	✓	✓	✓ **	✓		✓	✓
verb	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓ **
noun	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
dependent (relative) clause		✓ *	✓	✓	✓ *			✓ *
past participle	✓	✓		✓ **	✓			✓ **
clause	✓	✓		✓			✓ *	
object				✓	✓	✓		✓
preposition			✓	✓ **	✓			✓ **

gender	✓	✓			✓			
number	✓	✓			✓			
pronoun		✓			✓	✓		
antecedent		✓ *					✓ *	
direct object pronoun	✓							
main clause	✓							✓ **
possessive (construction/adjective)			✓					✓ **
conjugated verb								✓
definite article								✓ **
direct-object relative pronoun		✓						
object pronoun								✓ **
subject pronoun		✓						
subordinate clause	✓ *							
verb phrase	✓							

✓ = Term employed in grammar explanation

\* = Definition of term provided in grammar explanation

\*\* = Definition of term provided in glossary

Among the eight textbooks chosen for analysis, a total of 24 grammatical terms were counted. All the textbooks employed at least six different terms in their grammar explanations, with the average number of terms used across the textbooks numbering 10.25. The maximum number of grammatical terms included in an explanation was 15. In the eight textbooks examined, many of the same grammatical terms were included in the explanations of French relative pronouns. For example, all the textbooks employed the terms *relative pronoun* and *subject* in their lessons. However, *relative pronoun* was the only term that was explicitly defined in all the textbooks. Furthermore, out of all of the terminology used in the explanations, only five concepts (*relative pronoun*, *clause*, *subordinate clause*, *dependent (relative) clause*, and *antecedent*) were defined in the lesson of at least one of the textbooks. All other grammatical terms were never explicitly defined within the lesson. Table 2 summarizes the counts of grammatical terms used and defined in the lessons across all eight beginning level French textbooks.

Table 2

*Summary of Count Data across Eight French Textbooks*

	Grammatical terms used in the lessons	Grammatical terms defined in the lessons
Total	24	5
Minimum	6	1
Average	10.25	1.875
Maximum	15	3



## Discussion

Regarding the first research question, “Do the eight beginning level French textbooks surveyed use grammatical terminology to explain grammatical language features? If so, how many grammatical terms are used in a given explanation?”, the findings from the content analysis demonstrate that (1) all the textbooks use grammatical terminology in their grammar explanations and (2) the number of grammatical terms used in the explanations on relative pronouns ranges from 6 to 15. These results show the pervasiveness of grammatical terminology in beginning French language textbooks.

This pervasive presence of grammar terms may cause confusion among learners unfamiliar with terminology. As Berry (2008) argues, these labels add to students’ learning load. Therefore, it is important to evaluate materials based on the amount and type of terminology that will be most useful for learners. Materials that minimize grammatical terminology use may make grammar explanations easier to understand for all learners.

With reference to the second question, “Which grammatical terms are used?”, the examination of textbooks shows a total of 24 grammatical terms used across the eight books. Moreover, the findings indicate that the textbooks contain a number of different grammatical terms in their explanations of relative pronouns. For example, *relative pronoun* and *subject* are the only two terms common to all eight textbooks. Only 10 grammatical terms are shared among at least four of the eight textbooks: *relative pronoun*, *clause*, *verb*, *subject*, *direct object*, *past participle*, *noun*, *dependent (relative) clause*, *preposition*, and *object*. These findings suggest that textbooks use a wide range of grammatical terms, rather than a simplified common set of terms.

A judicious and consistent use of terminology in language materials can be mutually beneficial to educators and students by providing an uncomplicated means of drawing students’ attention to linguistic form. Furthermore, materials that make use of a common set of grammatical terms are valuable for both classroom use and as a support for students working independently outside the classroom.

Finally, concerning the last research question, “Do the textbooks provide explanations as to the meaning of these terms?”, the findings confirm that none of the textbooks defines all the terms in the lesson. The only term defined by all eight textbooks is *relative pronoun*; in fact, among the eight textbooks, the average number of terms defined within the lesson itself is 1.875. Even among the two textbooks containing a glossary of grammatical terms, not all the terms used in the lesson on relative pronouns are included in the glossary (see Table 1).

This pattern of not defining terms, along with heavy use of grammatical terminology, is a feature of all the textbooks. Jansma and Kassen (2011) acknowledge that, “Students typically know little formal grammar, so they are learning many of these labels for the first time” (p. AIE-15). Understanding the meaning of these terms is critical to understanding the grammar explanations. If, as the authors suggest, students do not know the meaning of these terms, they may have difficulty working through the descriptions of the language rules and learning the grammar. Undefined grammatical terminology can complicate textbook grammar explanations, thereby puzzling and causing problems for language learners. Minimizing the number of grammatical



terms, while also providing definitions for those terms, either in the lesson itself or a glossary, is key to fostering learners' understanding of grammar explanations.

When interpreting the results of this study, some limitations must be taken into account. It is important to note that this investigation's findings relate only to metalanguage used in textbook explanations of one specific grammatical target (i.e., relative pronouns). The results might not be generalizable to lessons on other aspects of grammar. Furthermore, this investigation focused only on beginning-level textbooks of French, and its findings may not generalize to grammatical terminology use in textbooks for other languages or levels. Finally, the data on terminology use were gathered from a limited sample of texts currently available in the educational market. Future investigations are necessary to analyze the use and treatment of grammatical terminology not only in a greater number of grammar lessons, but also in textbooks created for a variety of languages and levels.

## Conclusion

The current paper examined the use of grammatical terminology in textbooks designed for beginning learners of French. Do textbooks use grammatical terminology to explain grammar? If so, how many and what kinds of grammatical terms are used, and are these terms defined? In order to answer these questions, I examined grammar explanations on relative pronouns in eight beginning French textbooks. In summary, the extensive use of undefined grammatical terminology is evident in the results from the eight widely-used beginning French textbooks chosen for analysis. These textbooks not only introduce a number of grammar terms, but they also fail to define many of those terms. While terminology offers a straightforward way to discuss structural elements of a language, the amount of terminology used often complicates textbook grammar explanations and can cause difficulties for learners.

Although many terms are available to talk about language, reducing the use of terminology in textbooks to a limited set of the most essential terms may benefit language learners at all levels. Familiarity with a simple set of grammatical terms would enable learners to understand and engage with the grammar explanations contained in their textbooks. There are multiple ways of directing learners' attention to language form and supporting their comprehension of descriptions of that form. For example, in addition to limiting the use of grammatical terminology, textbook authors can use textual enhancement (e.g., bold-faced type and highlighting) to direct students' attention to language form. Indeed, many of the textbooks surveyed made use of this kind of implicit technique to enhance the input and encourage noticing among learners. Textbook authors can also use guiding questions or prompts to direct students' attention to target grammatical features, as in the textbook *Mais Oui!*. Techniques such as these can be used to induce learners to pay attention to key aspects of grammar with the goal of encouraging comprehension and learning.

Textbook grammar explanations may appear intimidating and impenetrable to students who are not comfortable with grammatical terminology. A lack of understanding of terms may cause confusion and discouragement among learners. By using a narrower set of terms along with techniques such as textual enhancement and guiding questions to direct learners' attention to linguistic form, textbook authors and teachers may be able to promote learning at all stages of second language development.

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# China Through the Lens: Teaching Chinese Language and Culture Through Film

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## **Abstract**

*Foreign language (FL) acquisition requires not only the development of target language skills, but also a cultural understanding of the region and its people. While this article addresses the development of an advanced Chinese language and culture course using film, the principles illustrated can be adapted for use in other advanced-level FL courses. Teaching language and culture using authentic film materials provides students with a variety of pedagogical learning opportunities. It not only encourages students to immerse themselves in the authentic language and culture of the area, but also motivates them to research the historical, political, and societal aspects of the period. This learning process stimulates critical thinking skills, requires students to compare and contrast the familiar with the unfamiliar, and enhances language and culture proficiencies through the use of the target language.*

**Key words:** *Language, Culture, Film, Instructional Methodologies, Motivation*

## **Background**

Foreign language (FL) acquisition requires not only the development of enhanced linguistic skills, but also a cultural understanding of the target language region. This includes a recognition of the historical, political, and societal issues that have influenced and shaped the country. Studies have shown that traditional textbook-centric advanced-level FL instructional methodologies may not be as effective in stimulating student language learning motivation or in enhancing their cultural awareness as other forms of media (Bien, 2011; Chen, A. M., 2009; Kitajima & Lyman-Hager, 1998; Sundquist, 2010). As Kern (2008) suggests, traditional textbook-derived classroom activities tend to “validate students’ personal experience and provide language practice, but do little to expand students’ understanding of things outside of their own cultural world” (p. 369).

To overcome these perceived limitations, FL instructors may experiment with a variety of media, from music to literature to film. Through these resources, students may be immersed in the language and culture of the target language region and in the values, perspectives, and motivations of its people (Hughes & LeLoup, 2018; Zhang, L., 2011; Zhang, P., 2013). This article introduces FL instructors to a creative alternative to textbook-only second language acquisition instructional methodologies.

Film can be an effective instrument to reach a new generation of language learners (Bueno, 2009; Chen, A. M., 2009; Garn, 2012; Harrison, 2009; Sturm, 2012;

Zhang, L., 2011). Since the advent of the Video Age, visual learning has come to be considered more conducive to the new generation of language learners (Altman, 1989). Film not only provides students with authentic FL and foreign culture interactions, it also offers students a vivid visual introduction to cultural and historical backgrounds with which they may be unfamiliar (Bien, 2011; Bueno, 2009; Garn, 2012; Sturm, 2012; Sundquist, 2010). The visual and verbal contextual cues not only deepen their understanding of the culture, but also broaden their vocabulary and increase their listening comprehension and verbal communication skills (Bien, 2011). Through the use of authentic target language films, students are provided with a multidimensional language teaching tool that infuses a distinct cultural and historical background into the language learning process (Garn, 2012; Zhang, L., 2011). Furthermore, film introduces the students to a variety of language levels, regional dialects, and colloquialisms, and provides them with visual cues to augment the language comprehension process (Sturm, 2012). Finally, the use of film in the classroom enables FL instructors to create an entertaining, fun, and captivating student-centered learning environment, as well as to promote challenging language learning opportunities that encourage students to engage in critical thinking and reflection (Chen, L., 2011; Diaz, 2016).

The use of film and film segments in the classroom enables instructors to address the twin goals of advanced FL learning. The first goal—increasing students' FL skill proficiencies in reading, writing, listening and speaking—is facilitated by exposing students to authentic language usage. The second goal—enhancing students' cultural awareness—is achieved by introducing films that verbally and visually depict the reality of target region society and culture during various historical eras, as well as illustrate the social and political influences during the period that led to change (Bien, 2011; Bueno, 2009; Dema & Moeller, 2012; Zhang, L., 2011).

*"China through the lens"* is designed for advanced (fourth-year) Chinese language students or those with equivalent proficiencies. In it, students gain an understanding of the Chinese societal perspectives unique to each film, which provides them with historical context and cultural insight, and they have an opportunity to experience authentic language usage within the defined parameters of the movie. Authentic film materials also provide students with a more in-depth awareness of how China's social, economic, and political developments have impacted the lives of its people (Kramsch, 2004). By employing cinematic images to bolster vocabulary, readings, and classroom discussions, students gain a more significant insight into the fundamental essence that is China (Wood, 1995). Rather than simply learning a language, students are introduced to the cultural, historical, and societal dynamics that have enabled China to endure for over 5,000 years. To effectively communicate in Chinese, learning the fundamentals of the language is half the battle; understanding the culture and history behind the language is the other half (ACTFL, 2015; Diaz, 2016).

## Literature Review

Many second language research studies have found that teaching FL and culture through film is an efficient and effective method to enhance language and culture competence (Bueno, 2009; Ning, 2009; Sturm, 2012; Zhang, D. & Yu, 2008). Chen (2009) suggests that students are better able to wholly acquire language skills

by employing the contextual clues derived from video. Kramsch (2004) posits that “if...language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching. Cultural awareness must then be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency” (p. 8). Kitajima and Lyman-Hager (1998) suggest that film can play a valuable role in the language learning process by helping students grasp primary themes, discern the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary, and expand their linguistic range by assessing and applying the situational context. They also propose that films and film segments can serve “as an advance organizer for language learning activities” (p. 40). In addition, Harrison (2009) argues that the groundwork for developing cultural competence can be nurtured by the intensive study of FL films in the classroom because it places the language in context, provides students with more in-depth understanding of critical periods of time within the target nation’s history, increases the desire to participate in study abroad programs, and may even generate interest in further study of the target language.

Film provides a unique link to the target language and culture because it is visual, it is authentic, it is readily available, and because to students in the digital age, accustomed as they are to a multimedia environment, it is extremely attractive (Sturm, 2012). Wood (1995) contends that the key characteristic of films is that they visually and verbally depict reality. Films can therefore “focus student attention more powerfully than other texts” so they “can be part of the process of leading students to a discernment of cultural reality” while “raising a viewer’s sense of linguistic and paralinguistic authenticity” (pp. 13-15). Kitajima & Lyman-Hager (1998) suggest that “theoretical and applied linguistics lend strong support for video as a provider of cultural, social and linguistic data sources in which the importance of context is all pervasive” (p. 44). Sundquist (2010) maintains that FL courses taught using film might actually enable language learners to “move beyond the subject matter covered in their textbooks to gain insight into intercultural similarities and differences” (p. 130). According to Zoreda (2005), popular culture is a unique by-product of its society. “In the particular case of film, society sees a reflection of its image-identity on screen, and subsequently, film continually shapes that collective identity” (p. 63). Garn (2012) also suggests that “advanced ‘content’ courses in the language, specifically, cinema and language courses...provide a unique window onto another culture that will help our students enormously in their motivation, knowledge, and language proficiency” (p. 40). Furthermore, Ning (2009) suggests that “The yawning gap between American and Chinese linguistic codes can potentially be bridged to a degree through the medium of film, because there is a widespread familiarity with filmic language” (p. 29).

“Language competence cannot develop without cultural competence,” suggests L. Zhang (2011, p. 202). Unfortunately, she notes, “Chinese culture instruction in the language classroom tends to center on Chinese products and their origins – such as moon cakes, red envelopes, and festivals – that do not delve into a deeper layer of Chinese ways of thinking or their mentality, values, and ideology” (p. 204). And Dema and Moeller (2012) argue that by expanding “the definition of culture to include how a specific culture behaves and interacts” instructors are able to better focus the teaching of culture in classrooms on the “underlying values, attitudes, and beliefs, rather than simply learning about cultural products and practices” (p. 79).

Chen points out that “[a]nother issue language instructors face is that language itself does not exist in a vacuum; there are cultural factors, social norms and expressions as well as all the varied nuances of meaning and structure” (Chen, A. M., 2009, p. 2). Zhang (2011) further suggests that the authenticity of spoken discourse and the rich visual and cultural elements from film clips are essential for teaching cultural perspectives. The study of FL films in the classroom can provide easier access to second language and culture acquisition and enhance students’ confidence in their ability to learn the language (Kitajima & Lyman-Hager, 1998; Kramsch, 2004; Sundquist, 2010; Wood, 1995).

## Course Development

There are several important stages for planning and executing the film course. The first key element is to determine the content and theme of the course being developed. The second step is to clearly define the target audience and the requisite language proficiency required. The next important step in the process is the selection of language- and culture-appropriate films for use in the course. The final aspect of planning the course is developing appropriate target language assignments, such as reading and translating film synopses; pondering and writing reflective essays; researching, preparing, and delivering individual or group oral presentations; discussing the film with the instructor and classmates; and actually watching and listening to the movie.

### *Rationale for Content-Based Instruction*

Using a content-based instructional (CBI) approach, which is well-supported by second language acquisition research, was the first decision made for the course (Cammarata, 2009; Channa & Soomro, 2015; Corrales & Maloof, 2011; Heinz, 2010; Kong, 2009). “Rather than concentrate on decontextualized language bits and pieces, a focus on cultural content—specifically historical and political occurrences” (Hughes & LeLoup, 2018, p. 46) as represented in the films of each period—was determined (Abrudan, 2016; Heinz, 2010; Met, 1999; Rodgers, 2014; Stryker & Leaver, 1997). Hughes and LeLoup (2018) also suggest that theme-based courses are not only conceived to facilitate FL instruction but also tend to incorporate a theme around which the course curriculum is developed. Themes may be selected for a number of reasons, including their ability to contribute to the enhancement of the student’s cultural and linguistic proficiency (ACTFL, 2015; Diaz, 2016; Heinz, 2010; Hughes & LeLoup, 2018; Kern, 2008). “*China through the lens*” is a language-driven (Channa & Soomro, 2015, p. 4) content-based cinematic curriculum that weaves a fascinating tapestry from essential elements of China’s culture, history, society, and especially, language.

### *Film Selection*

“*China through the lens*” is a student-centered advanced Chinese language and culture course, not a film or cinematography course. As such, the focus of the film selection is not on the cinematography, the music, the lighting, the camera angles, or the perspective of the filmmaker. Instead, the emphasis is on the authentic spoken discourse and the vivid visual and cultural contextual features associated with the



film that can enhance the students' language and culture learning process. Sturm (2012) and L. Zhang (2011) concur that movies in the classroom model authentic language discourse, introduce the target culture, and provide learners with the opportunity to communicate within a realistic context.

There are many methods for selecting representative films, including by genres, styles, chronological periods of time in Chinese history, country of origin (China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, etc.), or by specific film makers or directors, among others. Regardless of the selection method employed, it is necessary to ensure that each film be representative of its time, and that it provide a clear connection between the film and the language and culture it represents. Some course developers prefer to focus on a single film for the entire semester (Bien, 2011; Harrison, 2009); others develop their courses using two or more films from a specific genre (Garn, 2012). This particular course is designed specifically for advanced (fourth-year) Chinese language students, including students with equivalent proficiencies. In developing the curriculum, the author selected six critically acclaimed films representative of specific historical periods of time, although that number may be adjusted based on institutional circumstances. The goal, however, is to make the most effective use of that time to give students exposure to the broad spectrum of authentic target language material available in each cinematic presentation.

Each selected film is chosen for its specific authentic discourse, unique dialogue, and method of using Mandarin, and each is evaluated with respect to its historical context and its influence on or description of the Chinese society and culture of the period. Because the course is an advanced FL class, it is essential to pay particular attention to the language in the film. As Bien (2011) suggests, "it should be in modern standard Chinese with a minimum of, if any, regional dialects;" and, "the situations in the film should be realistic, natural, and reveal something about Chinese society and behavior..." (p. 160). This will facilitate student comprehension of film-specific words, grammar patterns, and general dialogue, while at the same time introducing the students to the manner of speech employed during the timeframe depicted.

The genre of each film is also very important as it exposes students to a variety of film types, depicting different time periods, and employing different styles of filmmaking. Some films are biographical, while others may be comedies, dramas, or tragedies. Some films are contemporary, while others may focus attention on the cultural and societal aspects and traditions of ancient China. Some films may address the use or misuse of military power, while other films may focus on the uncertainties of love.

A brief description and selection rationale for each of the six films follows:

*"The Emperor and the Assassin"* (荆轲刺秦王) (Chen, K., 1998), was selected for this course because of its powerful portrayal of the historical conditions and the political intrigue surrounding the king's efforts to unite China and establish its first dynasty. Directed by Chen Kaige, a well-known 5th-generation Chinese filmmaker, this film provides students with important insights into a seminal moment in Chinese history—the conclusion of the Warring States period and the establishment of a united China. It also depicts the challenging circumstances of the times that resulted in significant sacrifice by both nobles and peasants and strained individual and na-



tional loyalties. Students gain insight into some of the difficult choices people were often forced to make that were sometimes in conflict with their individual value systems. Its vivid imagery also provides a rich tapestry of cultural and societal customs and traditions during the period, and the classical language usage, manner of speech, and abundant unfamiliar vocabulary offer numerous opportunities for student language growth and development. In addition, students were encouraged to critically examine the “Just War” concept, and draw conclusions as to the value of a unified China versus the maintenance of individual small kingdoms.

*“Painted Skin”* (画皮) (Chan, 2008) is based in part on the Pu Songling’s Qing Dynasty classic short story of the same name (Pu, 2006), and was chosen because it exposes students to the importance of the vernacular literature of the period. Through this film, students are introduced to examples of Chinese fiction that deal with humans interacting with the supernatural, and the existence and mystical activities of gods, ghosts, spirits, and other creatures (Zeitlin, 1993). And, because the students have access to the original story in Chinese, as well as through an English translation, they are able to compare and contrast similarities and differences between the film and the written moral tales.

*“Forever Enthralled”* (梅兰芳) (Chen, K., 2008) introduces students to another Chinese film genre, the biographic film, also directed by Chen Kaige, about the life of Mei Lanfang, the legendary Beijing Opera artist. The purpose for selecting this film was to expose the students to the Beijing Opera, the essence of historical Chinese art, and one of China’s “national treasures” and most revered forms of artistic expression. The language employed in this film is also unique in that it incorporates a great deal of vocabulary and style and provides students with a descriptive understanding of this specific artistic form.

*“The Assembly”* (集结号) (Feng, 2007) provides students with an interesting, albeit, controversial perspective of both the Chinese Civil War and the Korean War. Students gain insight into Chinese military life by observing the hardships and sacrifices required of both soldiers and commoners during the period. They also gain a greater appreciation for the importance and significance of the role of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), and are exposed to the language of revolutionary slogans of the era used to motivate both soldiers and citizenry.

*“To Live”* (活着) (Zhang, Y., 1994) gives students awareness of the life and death circumstances and conditions of ordinary Chinese people from 1945’s Chinese Civil War to the Great Leap Forward, and on through the aftermath of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. It is also an excellent representation from the 5th-generation filmmaker, Zhang Yimou. During this portion of the course, students gain insight into the development of political movements during Mao’s regime, and their impact on the lives of ordinary people. Students are also challenged to compare and contrast the way of life depicted in the movie with that of the United States during the same time periods. Focused on the travails of a specific family, students are exposed to intimate conversations discussing family circumstances, celebratory activities, tragic events, and political movements.

*“If You are the One”* (非诚勿扰) (Feng, 2008) introduces students to societal developments in modern-day China. This film uses Chinese humor and contemporary language to explore the gradual societal developments that have influenced

modern Chinese dating, love and marriage, and other associated societal phenomena during the 1990s. It also demonstrates to students how Chinese attitudes towards dating are changing, especially among the younger generation, and how that shift is influencing current Chinese societal norms. Students are encouraged to compare their own dating challenges and experiences with those portrayed on screen.

### *Curriculum Design and Course Delivery*

The course curriculum is designed to help students make the connection between their language and culture learning processes and how changes in the political and societal environments may influence or facilitate developments in both the language and the culture. Throughout the semester, as students are introduced to each new film, they are provided with background information on the nature of the film, its directors, and actors. They are also introduced to various cinematic genres and their associated terminologies. Insight into the cultural and historical events associated with the film is also provided to broaden student awareness.

The course syllabus identifies the films to be studied, provides a short synopsis of each film in the target language, and includes a list of approximately 60 new vocabulary words, grammar patterns, and phrases that students are expected to learn on their own and to use in classroom discussions, presentations, and assessments. Students are also given on-line access to a university server from which to preview and review each film and film segment on their own time. The instructor may also provide additional input and insight into each film by employing personal experiences, news reports, and other resources to address the political, cultural, or historical circumstances that influenced each film's production. Throughout the course, and among all student and instructor interactions, emphasis was placed on the use of the target language at all times.

Many advanced FL film courses are created using textbooks specifically designed around a specific film, or around a specific film genre (Bien, 2011; Garn, 2012). While there are benefits that come with this approach, such as standardized language proficiency levels, vocabulary lists, culture notes and explanations, grammar and vocabulary exercises, and homework assignments, "*China through the lens*" was developed using the selected films as the primary source material. The advantage of this approach is that the language level can be adjusted to target the language proficiencies of the students in the class, vocabulary lists can be designed with specific film segment discourses and cultural illustrations in mind, and grammar, vocabulary, cultural assessments, and homework assignments can be addressed to buttress identified language learning concerns. More importantly, this student-centered approach encourages the instructor to engage in authentic target language discourse about the films' linguistic elements, cultural aspects, and political or societal activities that the students find interesting or where they desire greater insight and clarity.

As each new film is presented, the instructor describes the synopsis to the students in the target language. The students' initial challenge is to translate the written film synopsis from the target language to English. This assignment facilitates the identification and memorization of new lesson-specific vocabulary, demonstrates appropriate usage of new grammar patterns, and enables them to acquire a basic understanding of the film's setting, the primary characters, and the general storyline.

As class time is limited, with no more than six 53-minute class periods per film each semester, the students are instructed to watch the entire film on their own as homework, as well as to review the specific film segments that the instructor employs to address the primary language and culture learning objectives in each lesson.

The careful selection of these specific film segments is also an essential element of the advanced language course. Each segment must adequately represent the linguistic and cultural elements being introduced and later assessed. These segments should also highlight the appropriate historical and societal contexts to the students to enable them to better comprehend the storyline and the target language, as well as to gain a greater appreciation for the unique cultural characteristics of the period. For example, in *"To Live,"* a segment is selected in which Fengxia was about to give birth to a baby. While in the hospital, she experienced difficulties, but because the experienced doctors had been sent to the re-education camps, Fengxia was attended to by Red Guards, students, and inexperienced medical interns, and she ultimately dies from a hemorrhage. This clip illustrates how although it was the educated class that was criticized and put down during the Cultural Revolution, the common people also suffered.

Some film course developers, such as L. Zhang (2011) and P. Zhang (2013), suggest limiting the length of each film segment used in class to no more than three minutes. However, in developing *"China through the lens,"* the author chose to create longer segments to more fully immerse the students in the authentic discourse of the period and in the rich visual and contextual aspects of the film that help to illustrate the specific cultural and historical elements being highlighted.

As each film segment is played, the students engage in active listening, seeking to comprehend the general storyline, identify new vocabulary and grammar points, and recognize the historical and cultural significance of the period. Students are also expected to discuss the overall film, as well as each selected film segment, with their instructor and their classmates in the target language. Altman (1989) advises instructors to be cognizant of student comprehension levels at all times, and to frequently assess those comprehension levels. In the process, students are challenged to stretch their target language comprehension levels somewhat beyond their limitations. These routine language assessments may require the instructor to stop after each film segment to explain certain language and culture elements in order to provide greater insight and contextual clarity. Students are challenged to interact with their classmates and instructor in the target language, comprehend the conversation, and respond accordingly using the new ideas and concepts introduced in the lesson and reinforced during the assessments. Thus, their target language proficiency is gradually enhanced.

This assessment process is also a student-centered activity, requiring individual students to continually seek to progress from basic levels of language and culture knowledge, understanding, and application, to higher proficiency levels involving analysis, synthesis, and creativity (Zhang, P., 2013, p. 80). This proficiency development is assessed through oral and written assignments. For example, students are given an oral assignment to discuss, in a one-on-one setting with the instructor; topics such as 1940s China, the Chinese Civil War, The Great Leap Forward, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, weddings and other celebratory events during the period, or a comparison between US and China in the 1960s, among others. Students

choose their topic of interest and are encouraged to use the new vocabulary and sentence structure associated with each respective film. Each student will meet with the instructor for a 20-30 minute discussion block, and then follow up their discussion with a target language essay describing specific aspects of the depicted events in the film that most deeply affected or impressed them. They are assessed on accurate language usage, their expressed depth of understanding of the event described, and the critical thinking displayed as they apply the lessons learned to their own perspective and circumstances.

*“China through the lens”* encourages this proficiency development by requiring students to continually review basic lesson-specific vocabulary, grammar, culture, and content. In addition, students are required to use the target language to explain why characters act in certain ways or make specific decisions. They are invited to consider historical backgrounds, societal issues, and character motivations to ascertain meaning and arrive at conclusions. In addition, they are tasked with reflecting on each film, and expressing, through research presentations and essay composition, their thoughts and feelings on the film, the cultural understanding they gained, and what aspect of the film provided the greatest insight or caused them to consider how they might respond in similar circumstances.

### **Course Reflections**

The key to encouraging effective research presentations is to give students just enough guidance to inspire their curiosity, and then allow them to explore their chosen research topic. Small groups (2-3 students) conduct research on each assigned target language film using one of the five or six instructor-provided topical prompts, or another approved topic of their own choosing. These student research projects cover a variety of thought-provoking topics. For example, suggested presentation topics for *“The Assembly”* include: an introduction of the Chinese military, the great movement to resist America and assist Korea from the Chinese perspective, the Korean War from the US perspective, modern Chinese war, including the Anti-Japanese War (WWII), the Sino-Vietnamese War, the Chinese Civil War, and an analysis of the development of the Chinese military. Other examples of student presentations from the movie, *“To Live”* (活着), include the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, a comparison of the types of weddings held during the period to those conducted in contemporary Chinese society, the popularity of Chinese puppet shows during the period, and the prevalence of gambling, opium-smoking, and other vices at that time. In addition, for each film, students are also assigned to compare and contrast the depicted Chinese cultural, social, and historical events and consequences with situations and events in the United States, thereby engaging in a critical thinking process designed to facilitate greater student understanding and awareness of societal developments in both cultures.

Student enthusiasm and motivation is very high, particularly when the group chooses their own topic. Each group prepares their topical research study, and each member of the group presents a portion of the study to their classmates using the target language. These presentations address the background of the film, its cultural and historical context, and the political and social issues evident during the period. Following each presentation, the group leads the class in a target language discussion

of their research and findings, responding to questions and comments from the class and the instructor. Through this process, students validate their language and culture proficiencies as they demonstrate a more in-depth understanding of the historical, political, and social constructs of period represented, and an awareness of why and how the people responded the way they did. These presentations frequently generate rather in-depth discussions about China and its growth and development, as well as about parallel or contrasting issues elsewhere in the world during the same time period.

The students' reflective essay assignments also displayed some very impressive Chinese language and culture learning. Students were assigned to write a short essay in the target language about which aspects of the movie most impressed them and how they felt the historical and political events of the time had influenced the people. This reflection opportunity enabled them to more fully internalize what they had learned. It also provided them the opportunity to employ the new vocabulary words and grammar patterns they had been exposed to, and encouraged them to stretch their language abilities to express their thoughts and feelings on paper.

A representative student reflection (观后感) of the movie, *"The Assembly,"* (集结号) suggests (all comments in Chinese taken directly from individual student essays; all English translations by the author): “战争永远会是一个残酷的现实，但是《集结号》把战争的残忍描绘的十分感人” (Wars are forever the cruel reality; however, the movie, *The Assembly*, depicted the cruelties of the war in a very touching manner). He also notes that “有一些战争是不可避免的; 但是我们只能希望战争的结果可以大于战争的后果” (some wars may not be easily avoided; however, we only hope that the results can be more significant than the consequences). He continues his essay by acknowledging that “人的生命是很脆弱的，作为领导我不能把人的生命当作一个数据必须无条件的保护生命” (People's lives are fragile. As a leader, I cannot treat people's lives as a simple number, I must protect them unconditionally). He then concludes his assignment by expressing hope that “我希望我以后可以从多个角度考虑后果，选出最合理的方案” (in the future, I will consider issues from different angles and their impact, and make the most rational decisions).

Another representative student reflection about the film, *"If You are the One,"* (非诚勿扰) proposes that “这部电影最大的亮点就是真实，贴切和不做作” (some of the biggest highlights of this movie were its authenticity, its appropriateness, and its unpretentiousness). This student also felt that “这部电影描述了中国社会当代上的一些新的问题” (this movie portrayed some new issues in contemporary China). For example, “越来越多的人在网上交友，婚外孕，和婚外恋” (more and more people using online dating, out of wedlock pregnancies, and extra marital affairs).

These examples of students' written reflections are typical of the language level and contemplative expression submitted by other students in the course, and demonstrate remarkable student insight and understanding of the films. They also display an impressive use of the target language to express their thoughts and ideas, and a cultural awareness of the events occurring within China that led to changes in the existing political and social structures of the times. The students were also able to employ excellent critical thinking skills to relate to each film's content, and to consider how the lessons and events observed may apply in their own lives. Mihaly

(2008) suggests that the opportunity to reflect on these cultural components actually strengthens student critical thinking skills. And Diaz (2016) points out that encouraging students to develop critical thinking skills is useful because it “is a competency that is transferable to other disciplines because the essence of the skill rests in how you approach an issue or problem, rather than something that is issue or problem-specific” (p. 439).

An additional interesting observation involved the students’ response to the films themselves. Some students enjoyed the classical period films and the culture and history portrayed in them. Other students gravitated to the films about more contemporary life and love, and were able to relate very well to the situations depicted. However, almost all of the students appeared to be captivated by the war movies, and many commented on the fact that regardless of nationality, culture, or language, soldiers in every era fought, sacrificed, and even died for the greater good of their community and their nation, just as our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines have done.

Finally, following each film, students are given a comprehensive graded assessment to evaluate the linguistic and cultural insights gained through the study of the film. This graded assessment, like other course assignments, is a two-part process comprised of both oral and written components. Students meet individually with the instructor and discuss the film’s historical and cultural aspects, as well as which parts of the film most resonate with the student. Following the interview, students are given a multi-question target language exam (Appendix) in which they demonstrate critical thinking skills and elaborate on their impressions of the specific film, and compare and contrast elements of the film with their own societal and cultural experiences.

## **Conclusion**

Harrison (2009) suggests that studying FLs through film encourages students to “learn to look at language as a vehicle instead of an obstacle, gaining more confidence in their language abilities: the film, therefore, becomes the gateway to language and culture” (p. 92). This film course has been taught three times and has received significant constructive feedback from the students each year. Students have expressed their enjoyment of the course, not only for their language improvement, but also for the cultural perspective it provided them. Students also found value in the authentic materials that led to their using listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to understand and explain the storyline. The films reviewed also broadened their perspective and expanded their understanding of Chinese culture and civilization throughout the segmented historical periods of time that were studied. Their cultural presentations were a real highlight because they had the opportunity to research and summarize the background and topics of particular interest to them.

One of the major advantages of learning language and culture through film, according to course participants, is that students were able to rely on the vivid imagery and the actions of the characters to intelligently make sense contextually of the meaning of the plot. Although the students frequently struggled with understanding every word or every phrase in a film or in a film segment, they were able to employ the visual cues to follow the story and to better comprehend the language itself. Another advantage to using film is that the students can use their own time to watch the movie



again and again, individually, and as a group, to gain a better understanding of its nuances. They did note, however, that they recommend replacing “*Forever Enthralled*” (梅兰芳) with a more relatable contemporary film. “*Forever Enthralled*” was not well-received by students during the course, primarily because they found that the pervasive use of a strong Beijing accent made the language difficult to understand, and because of the artistic nature of the biographical film. Based on this feedback, a different film, “*Caught in the Web*” (搜索) (Chen, K., 2013), also directed by Chen Kaige, has been selected for inclusion in the next iteration of the course. This film, which deals with contemporary Chinese social and ethical considerations as the destructive effects of a viral video influences the characters’ personal and professional lives, should be very interesting and relatable to fourth-year Chinese language students.

Student feedback also resulted in the development of a follow-on cinema course curriculum that focuses exclusively on contemporary Chinese films that are more reflective of current Chinese societal issues. Numerous students expressed interest in viewing and researching films depicting contemporary China so that the similarities and differences could be compared and contrasted with challenges young people face in the United States today.

These film courses are by no means simply a compendium of movie watching activities. They involve sophisticated research, the development of polished presentations, the study of more refined language structure and usage, the ability to succinctly summarize the film plot and storyline, and the application of critical thinking skills. In addition, they are taught entirely in the target language, require students to use all of their acquired FL listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to process information, and then incorporate the new language concepts acquired into their daily language usage during discussions, presentations, and assessments.

Teaching FL and culture through film is a continual process of evaluation and refinement. The course itself does not generate a specific end-state, but rather becomes a valuable tool towards developing greater student cultural and linguistic proficiency and understanding.

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## Appendix

### 电影“活着”观后测试题

姓名: \_\_\_\_\_

\* 请自己单独做题，并正确表明参考资料的来源。请不要与他人交流。

#### 一. 请用以下电影“活着”中的词组造句（15分）：

1. 怀疑：
2. 肯定：
3. 对付：
4. 总之：
5. 厉害：

#### 二. 请翻译电影中的这些台词（30分）：

1. “按政策政府要分那院房。他不交，把那院房烧了，这不，成了反革命破坏。”
2. “十五年赶上英国，超过美国不在话下。”
3. “鸡长大了就变成了鹅；鹅长大了就变成了羊；羊长大了就变成了牛；牛以后呢？  
牛以后就是共产主义了。”
4. “你把礼物给他退回去。他的东西咱不要。”
5. “他是走资派。昨天开了他的批评大会。”
6. “馒头长大了就不骑牛了，就坐火车，坐飞机。”

三. 请回答下列“活着”这个电影中的问题（30分）：

1. 很多人觉得这个电影令人悲伤难过。你觉得呢？你最喜欢电影中的那一段？为什么？
2. 在这个电影中，龙二赌博赢了福贵的祖传宅子。后来他被枪毙了。为什么？
3. 福贵和家珍在大跃进时期的工作是什么？凤霞怎么成了哑巴了？
4. 医院的医生为什么没能挽救凤霞的生命？
5. 春生后来到福贵家要把他自己的钱都给福贵和家珍。为什么？他为什么想死？

四. 请根据电影“活着”中的历史背景，回答下列问题（25分）：

1. 2017年中国政府把抗日战争改成14年。这是为什么？
2. 请简单讲述一下中国解放战争的起因和结果。
3. 请简单陈述一下什么是“大跃进”和“文化大革命”？
4. 这个电影中的很重要的一部分是大跃进和文化大革命。
5. 请你试着比较一下60年代中国和美国的文化 and 政治运动。

# The Reading Comprehension Strategies of Second Language Learners: A Spanish-English Study

**Karen Acosta**

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## **Abstract**

*This study identified the reading comprehension strategies that English-speaking college students enrolled in beginner, intermediate, and advanced Spanish language classes at a major Midwestern university in the United States used to comprehend a text in their second language. The findings suggest that readers tended to use the same comprehension strategies when approaching a text in their second language, regardless of their proficiency level. However, there was a qualitative difference in how these strategies were used by readers of low, middle, and high proficiency in Spanish. Readers of all levels used their first language when reading in their second language.*

**Key words:** *reading comprehension, reading comprehension strategies, second language reading, Spanish language learners*

## **Background**

Researchers, educators, and foreign language program directors that work with students who are learning a second language need to understand what learners do when they approach language and literacy tasks in that language. The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the reading comprehension strategies used by college students who were native speakers of English and who were enrolled in beginning, intermediate, and advanced Spanish foreign language classes at a major Midwestern university in the United States.

Identifying what readers do when they encounter a text in a foreign language and understanding their thought processes more thoroughly may provide relevant information to the development of curriculum and instruction, potentially guiding teacher training and informing curriculum planning decisions. Furthermore, educators who understand what readers of different proficiency levels do—and what they need to do in order to be successful in their reading efforts—will be more likely to attend to their students' specific needs, helping them move toward achieving higher levels of reading and language proficiency.

## **Literature Review**

### *Vocabulary*

Vocabulary plays a major role in reading comprehension for both L1 and L2 readers (Coady, 1997; NRP, 2000; NLP, 2006), since, without vocabulary, reading a text and understanding its meaning are not possible. According to Nation (1990,

2001), to be successful readers, L2 learners need to know approximately 98% of the words that are in the materials they read. This means that L2 readers need to have and use their knowledge of L2 vocabulary in order to function in a second language successfully. While an essential vocabulary base of 2,000 words (Hinkel, 2006; Hirsh & Nation, 1992; Nation, 1990) is sufficient for daily interaction, that number increases to 5,000 if the goal is to comprehend written texts that are addressed to a general audience (Nation, 1990; Hirsh & Nation, 1992).

L2 readers may benefit from using cognates by drawing from prior knowledge in their L1 when encountering new words in the second language (Tindall & Nisbet, 2010). However, the transfer of cognates requires a certain degree of awareness on the part of the reader, as not all words that look or sound alike are cognates. False cognates may be a source of misunderstanding and confusion for L2 readers. In addition, the transfer of L1 to L2 vocabulary does not occur when the writing systems of the two languages are different (Birch, 2002; Koda, 1999, 2005; Hinkel, 2006), such as Chinese and Hebrew.

Vocabulary development is aided by extensive reading in the L2 (Coady, 1993; Constantino, Lee, Cho, & Krashen, 1997; Hinkel, 2006; Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010; Nation, 2001; Pitts, White, & Krashen, 1989) because extensive reading offers learners exposure to new and old vocabulary. However, the process is gradual and may only become evident after a certain level of L2 proficiency is achieved (Coady, 1993). Consequently, for less proficient language learners, graded or simplified texts with controlled vocabulary may be preferable to support decoding (Nation, 2001), but they would offer fewer opportunities to learn new vocabulary.

In a study that looked at depth of L2 vocabulary knowledge, Nassaji (2004) used think aloud protocols to identify the degree and types of strategies used by the readers to derive word meaning from context. The study found that there was a significant relationship between depth of vocabulary knowledge, strategy use, and success. L2 readers who had stronger vocabulary knowledge utilized certain strategies, such as inferencing, more frequently compared to readers who had weaker vocabulary knowledge, and depth of vocabulary had a significant contribution to success.

In addition to predicting the use of strategies and facilitating reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge has been found to be strongly related to learners' ability to read and acquire new information from texts in both L1 and L2 (Nagy, 1997; Nation, 2001; Parry, 1997; Pulido, 2003; Qian, 1999, 2002; Read, 2000; Wesche & Paribakht, 1999). For example, Pulido (2003) found that vocabulary knowledge was correlated with incidental vocabulary gains from reading. Other studies related to L2 reading vocabulary found that vocabulary makes a greater contribution to L2 reading comprehension than grammar (Bossers, 1991; Brisbois, 1995; Taillefer, 1996).

### *Reading Comprehension*

Reading comprehension is the process through which readers engage a text and extract meaning from it. Tindall and Nisbet (2010) call reading comprehension the "focus of all reading engagement" because readers need to be able to read text fluently, have sufficient prior knowledge and vocabulary, and be able to apply strategies when reading. Some limitations to L2 reading comprehension include limited vocabulary knowledge, unfamiliar content, and limited knowledge of L2 language structures.

In addition, cultural and social elements related to language might also be a limitation to reading comprehension because values, experiences, beliefs, and concepts can vary across languages and cultures. Different studies suggest that L2 readers may benefit from working with culturally familiar texts (Johnson, 1981, 1982; Pritchard, 1990; August, 2003) because reading comprehension is enhanced in children and adult readers when they read culturally familiar content.

### *Reading Comprehension Strategies*

Reading comprehension strategies are “the conscious actions readers use to repair breakdowns in comprehension (cognitive strategies) or the deliberate actions readers use to monitor and oversee those attempts at repair (metacognitive strategies)” (McNeil, 2011, p. 885) and they are important to both L1 and L2 reading. L2 reading comprehension is also impacted by L1 reading ability and L2 language knowledge (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995; Lee & Schallert, 1997; Perry, 2013; Song, 1998).

Research shows that more proficient L2 readers, those with high reading comprehension and/or a high knowledge of the L2, are different from less proficient L2 readers in how they use strategies (Anderson, 1991; Block, 1986, 1992; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2006; Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996; Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004; Wang, 2016; Yang, 2006). The differences in strategy use by less proficient L2 readers compared to more proficient L2 readers are due to deficits in lexical knowledge, decoding skills, and syntactical knowledge (Alderson, 1984; Clarke, 1979; Koda, 2007; Nassaji, 2007; Wang, 2016). In addition, less proficient L2 readers have fewer resources to apply to higher-level cognitive or metacognitive strategies.

Jiménez, García, and Pearson (1996) found that successful bilingual readers understood the relationship between the L1 and L2, were aware of the similarity between the languages, and explicitly transferred information or strategies learned in one language to the other language as they thought aloud. They also knew English-Spanish cognate relationships and substituted words from their other language when they encountered unknown vocabulary. However, less successful L2 readers were unable to identify strategies to help their comprehension of the text and tended to view their L1 and L2 as two separate, unrelated languages. Perhaps the most compelling finding from the Jiménez et al. (1996) study is, however, that successful L2 learners used strategies that were unique to their bilingual status. These findings indicated that students reprocessed L2 words into their L1 while reading L2 texts. The strategies that L2 learners used were cognate knowledge, information transfer between languages, and mental translation.

Similarly, Upton and Lee-Thompson (2001) explored the way students used their L1 and L2 while they read and found that L2 readers accessed and used their L1 in the comprehension strategies they employed. They found that mental translation was a common way for adult learners to “reprocess” L2 words into L1 words as they read a text in their L2. However, the degree to which learners relied on their L1 declined as their proficiency in the L2 increased.

Research has found that reading strategies can be transferred between languages, and that there is a correlation between reading performance in the L1 and L2, especially for more proficient readers (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995; Brisbois, 1995; Perales Escudero & Reyes Cruz, 2014; Taillefer, 1996; Yamashita, 2002a). However,

without explicit strategy instruction, readers may continue using only those strategies instead of developing new strategies for the L2. This practice may be detrimental because L1 strategies are not always fully successful in helping readers comprehend L2 text (Yamashita, 2002b).

### *Think Aloud Protocols*

Think aloud protocols have been used in language research to identify and study the ways in which learners notice and process language. L1 reading research has employed think alouds (Bereiter & Bird, 1985; Fox, 2009; Kucan & Beck, 1997; Kuusela & Paul, 2000; Strømsø, Bråten, & Samuelstuen, 2003) to investigate reading strategies used by young and adult learners to determine differences between the thought processes of less and more successful readers, to provide explicit instruction to improve learners' reading skills, and to explore students' writing processes in their L1.

In second language acquisition research, think alouds have been used to gain insight into the cognitive processes and strategies learners use when they read in their L2 (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Yang, 2006); to examine the role of mental translation as a strategy that L2 readers use when they encounter a text (Kern, 1994); and to compare the reading strategies that readers use in their L1 and L2 (Davis & Bistodeau, 1993; Jiménez, García, & Pearson, 1996; Upton and Lee-Thompson, 2001; Wang, 2016).

Many L2 readers spend much of their time thinking about L2 texts in their first language. Research that examined other L1s and a range of language proficiencies (Kern, 1994; Lee, 1986a, 1986b; Perry, 2013; Upton, 1997) found that L2 readers use their L1 as they try to comprehend an L2 text. This may be a way for learners to confirm their understanding of the text or to store what they comprehend in a more efficient way. Other studies suggest that this may simply be the readers' "language of thought." Lee (1986a, 1986b) found that college students taking Spanish as a foreign language were able to express their understanding in a more complete way when they were allowed to write in their L1. Similarly, Moll (1988) found that the readers' reports in their L1 provided a better picture of their reading comprehension. Thus, allowing readers to think aloud in their L1 when reading in their L2 may result in a better understanding of the reading process.

### **Limitations of Think Alouds**

Although think aloud protocols have been successfully used to explore different reading processes in L2, there are also limitations to using them as a tool for researching reading. Block (1986) states that think alouds are most useful when they provide information about the learners' reading processes as they have trouble understanding what they are reading; however, processes that are already automatic or cannot be easily verbalized by learners are more challenging to study. Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) write that fully automatic processes are difficult to self-report because "they occur very quickly, so much so that intermediate products of processing are not heeded in short-term memory and, thus, not available for self-report" (p. 9). Therefore, think alouds are better for studying processes "that have not been automatized, ones that are still under conscious control" (p. 9).

Even though researchers have frequently used think alouds to study language

and reading, their use has been at times controversial. Rossomondo (2007) explains that, “concerns have been raised as to the validity of employing think aloud protocols as a means of data collection because of the possibility that the act of thinking aloud actually adds an additional task that might affect processing” (p. 44).

In order to determine whether verbalization affected the subjects’ task performance, several studies have used separate groups, with one group completing the task silently and the other groups completing the task while doing a think aloud (Bowles & Leow, 2005; Leow & Morgan-Short, 2004; Rossomondo, 2007), and found no significant difference between the groups, concluding that “thinking aloud is not reactive; that is, thinking aloud did not add an additional attentional burden” (Rossomondo, 2007, p. 60).

Ericsson and Simon (1993) found that in groups that were asked to complete the think aloud non-metacognitively; that is, without justifying or hypothesizing about the process, the subjects’ performance was usually not significantly different from the subjects who completed the same task silently. However, if subjects were asked to complete the task by thinking aloud metacognitively; that is, providing reasons, hypotheses, or conjectures about the process, their performance was significantly different from the performance of the silent subjects, sometimes underperforming and sometimes outperforming the silent group.

Non-metacognitive verbalizations do not seem to have an impact on cognitive processes when compared to silent control groups. Therefore, this type of concurrent verbal protocol appears to be a valid way of exploring learners’ cognitive processes as they read and complete tasks. Leow and Morgan-Short (2004) recommend that this type of verbalization be collected because this allows learners to focus on the task without having to look for an explanation as to why they are thinking what they are thinking, instead simply voicing their thoughts as they read.

## Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the reading comprehension strategies used by college students who are native speakers of English and who were enrolled in beginning, intermediate, and advanced Spanish foreign language courses. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the reading comprehension strategies used by native English language college students who are beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners of Spanish as a second/foreign language when approaching a text in their L2?
2. How do these college students use their first language (English) when they encounter reading or comprehension difficulties in a Spanish text?

## Methods

### *Participants*

The study was conducted in the Spanish foreign language program of a major university in the Midwest United States. The participants of this study were students whose first language is English, who were enrolled in intensive beginner courses, upper intermediate courses, and advanced level courses in the Spanish program. In order to identify such students, participants filled out a background questionnaire



during the data collection session. Fifteen think alouds from each level were selected for analysis for a total of 45 think alouds across the three levels of proficiency.

### *Materials, Procedures, and Data Collection*

Participants completed a Spanish placement exam, which was a version of the University of Wisconsin System Spanish Language Usage and Reading Exam, modified due to the time constraints of the data collection session. It was possible to establish the modified test's own reliability measure and confirm that it was an accurate measure of Spanish proficiency, with an overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient  $\alpha$  of 0.835, and individual test items ranging between 0.821 and 0.838. This placement exam served to establish the participants' level of proficiency in the L2, independently from the class in which they were enrolled and from their self-reported Spanish level. The scores also determined which students' think alouds were to be included in the data analysis.

Participants were provided with instructions in English explaining think alouds and their procedure, a sample think aloud transcript, and a warm-up activity before they recorded their own protocol. Students were asked to start reading and thinking aloud non-metacognitively, that is without justifying or hypothesizing about the process, as they worked through the text passage (Bowles & Leow, 2005; Leow & Morgan-Short's, 2004; Rossomondo, 2007). The language of verbalization was English (Bowles, 2010).

An expository text from a world news source in Spanish about a culturally unfamiliar topic was used for the study. To determine their actual familiarity with the topic, participants completed a familiarity questionnaire during the data collection session (Block, 1986; Davis & Bistodeau, 1993). Participants also completed a written recall protocol to assess reading comprehension (Lee, 1986b) without being able to look back to complete the task, and a background information questionnaire that focused on students' language knowledge, experience, and reading. In order to assess the participants' comprehension of the text, participants also completed a multiple choice comprehension test that addressed (a) low level/in text information, (b) high level/go beyond the text information, and (c) vocabulary related questions.

In order to participate in the study, students signed up electronically and their information was kept confidential. Data collection sessions lasted 50 minutes and were conducted in a computer language lab using software that allowed control of participants' access to the text and their computer screens, as well as the ability to start and stop their think aloud audio recordings. All materials were presented using software that made it possible to lock the students' work stations and limit their Internet access.

To ensure confidentiality, each student's data were identified by a number, thus making it impossible to tell which students recorded which think alouds. During the data collection session, participants wore headsets with microphones, which prevented them from listening to other people's recordings.

### *Data Analysis*

*Inclusion of Participants in the Data Analysis.* In order to determine which participants would be included in the data analysis, three groups of 15 participants each were formed. The information gathered during the data collection sessions was or-



ganized, collapsing the files to make (a) a single file that contained the data of all students who completed a session, (b) separate files for each course, and (c) separate files for each level; that is, combining the participants who were beginner students but enrolled in different courses. Every participant's level check test was scored and their results were sorted along with enrollment information. Groups were based on the participants' level of proficiency as evidenced by the level check, as opposed to the levels in which students were enrolled. This entailed mixing students enrolled in different levels to make groups of participants that scored similarly on the proficiency test.

The SPSS Statistics software was used to separate the participants' scores on the test into three separate groups. Students who reported a first language other than English and/or a primary language spoken at home other than English were eliminated from the group. Of the 82 remaining students, participants of each level who received the same or similar scores on the placement test and whose first language was English were considered for inclusion in the data analysis. Additional criteria for making the three 15-participant groups were (a) excluding participants who did not complete all the tasks, (b) excluding participants whose recordings were difficult to hear/poorly articulated or that suffered technical difficulties, (c) excluding think alouds in which the student was often quiet, and (d) when possible including participants whose proficiency based on the level check matched the course in which they were enrolled, in order to keep participants who were enrolled in courses true to their proficiency level together.

In order to avoid confusion, an alternate set of labels for the groups in the study was created based on their level as evidenced by the proficiency test. When discussing groups formed for analysis for the purposes of this study, the labels low-proficiency, middle-proficiency, and high-proficiency are used. When discussing groups based on enrollment, the labels beginner, intermediate, and advanced are used.

### *Qualitative Analysis.*

A strict transcription of the think alouds was done, including participants' pauses, sighs, and yawns. The think aloud transcriptions were coded qualitatively, according to the strategies identified in each paragraph, in order to keep the original context of the participants' think alouds (LaPelle, 2004). Reading comprehension strategies found by other studies using think alouds (Jiménez et al, 1996; Kamhi-Stein, 2003; Upton and Lee-Thompson, 2001; Wang, 2016; Yang, 2006) with L2 learners served as a guide during the collection and transcription of data and became the basis for the qualitative codebook. The following reading comprehension strategies were used in the coding of the think aloud protocols: focusing on vocabulary, summarizing, restating/rereading the text, paraphrasing, using context clues, decoding, inferencing, questioning, predicting, confirming/disconfirming, integrating information, invoking prior knowledge, monitoring, visualizing, evaluating, noticing novelty, demonstrating awareness, searching for cognates, translating, code-switching, and transferring.

The coded transcriptions of the think alouds were used to address the research questions. The coded transcriptions provided information about participants' specific strategies. They also provided information about how participants used the same or different strategies when they came across difficulties in the text. In addition, the

think alouds made it possible to draw connections between different participants of the same level who struggled with the same sections of the text similarly. Further, it was possible to make comparisons of certain strategies used for specific sections of the text by participants across levels.

During the qualitative coding process it became evident that participants tended to use the same strategies and that some strategies were used more widely than others. Consequently, rather than addressing all nineteen strategies that were originally described in the codebook, the most commonly observed strategies became the focus of the analysis. In order to determine which strategies were the most commonly used, the coded transcriptions were reviewed and counted to determine how many strategies were used by each of the participants throughout the reading and how many times each strategy was used by each participant. The frequency of strategies participants used was determined and compared across proficiency levels, and the qualitative data was then quantified using the data transformation approach (Creswell, 2003).

#### *Quantitative Analysis.*

Following the concurrent model, the qualitative data was quantified. According to Creswell (2003), the data transformation approach involves “creating codes and themes qualitatively, then counting the number of times they occur in the text data” (p. 221). Creswell (2003) argues that this quantification of qualitative data “enables a researcher to compare quantitative results with the qualitative data” (p. 221). This approach made it possible to identify and describe the reading comprehension strategies qualitatively by using the data that emerged from the think alouds, and then to quantify the frequency of their use.

After the qualitative coding process was completed, the SPSS statistical analysis software was used to run (a) descriptive tests, (b) analysis of variance (ANOVA), and (c) post hoc tests, such as the Tukey HSD, in order to determine the number of strategies used by each participant and the frequency with which each strategy was used by each participant.

## **Findings**

### **Strategy Use**

The following tables show how many strategies, in all, participants used when reading the Spanish text, and whether there was a difference in frequency of strategy use between groups and within groups. In addition, the tables shown below provide an itemization of which specific strategies were used by participants in each level, and how frequently they used them throughout the reading passage.

The descriptive statistics for the number of strategies used are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Number of Strategies Used*

Group	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Low	15	7.80	3.529	2	13
Middle	15	8.40	2.131	2	12
High	15	8.67	3.677	1	13
Total	45	8.29	3.138	1	13

The mean scores for the participants in the low-proficiency group (7.80) were lower than the mean scores for the middle-proficiency (8.40) and high-proficiency (8.67) groups. However, the results indicated that the mean scores for the middle-proficiency (8.40) and high-proficiency (8.67) groups were almost identical. The descriptive statistics also revealed that the minimum and maximum number of strategies used by readers in each group were similar. The mean scores were then submitted to a one-way ANOVA, which is presented below in Table 2.

Table 2

*ANOVA for Number of Strategies Used*

Task		df	SS	MS	F	p
Strategies Used	Between Groups	2	5.911	2.956	.290	.749
	Within Groups	42	427.333	10.175		
	Total	44	433.244			

The results of the ANOVA revealed no significant difference in the number of strategies used between the groups [ $F(2,42) = 0.290$ ,  $p=0.749$ ]. Taken together, these results suggest that the number of strategies that participants used in this study when reading a text in Spanish was not significantly different from the readers of other proficiency levels. The descriptive statistics for the nineteen strategies used by readers in all groups revealed the most frequently used strategies to be (1) focusing on vocabulary, (2) decoding, (3) monitoring, (4) inferencing, (5) paraphrasing, (6) searching for cognates, and (7) translating (See Appendix A for an itemized view of the frequency with which each strategy was used by readers across proficiency groups). The mean scores were then submitted to a one-way ANOVA that revealed no significant difference for the frequency with which each strategy was used by the three proficiency groups, in most cases (See Appendix B for details).

These findings suggest that, in most cases, the frequency with which participants in this study used the reading comprehension strategies was not significantly different from readers of other proficiency levels. The readers in the low-proficiency group decoded much more frequently than the readers in the high-proficiency group. Although there was no significant difference found in the frequency of use of this strategy between either the low-proficiency and middle-proficiency groups, or

between the middle-proficiency and high-proficiency groups, these last two groups approached significance in a way that aligned with the expected trend. That is, more proficient readers decoded words less frequently than less proficient readers, which may indicate that readers who had more vocabulary knowledge also read more fluently, thus needing to use the decoding strategy less when reading.

Further, these results also suggest that even though participants of all groups used the searching for cognates strategy, more proficient readers used this strategy less frequently, which may indicate that because more proficient readers had a larger vocabulary, they did not need to rely on cognates as often as the less proficient readers. There was a statistically significant difference in how frequently this strategy was used by both the low-proficiency and high-proficiency groups, and the middle-proficiency and high-proficiency groups. The frequency with which readers in the low-proficiency and middle-proficiency groups used this strategy was not significantly different.

### **Reading Comprehension Strategies**

Nineteen observable strategies were coded to analyze the think-aloud transcripts. Briefly, the comprehension strategies were: focusing on vocabulary, summarizing, restating/rereading the text, paraphrasing, using context clues, decoding, inferencing, questioning, predicting, confirming/disconfirming, integrating information, invoking prior knowledge, monitoring, visualizing, evaluating, noticing novelty, demonstrating awareness, searching for cognates, translating, code-switching, and transferring. The last four strategies required participants to use their first language, and therefore were defined as bilingual comprehension strategies and will be discussed in a separate section.

Five of the non-bilingual reading comprehension strategies were found to be common and widely used by participants in all three proficiency groups. These five strategies were (a) focusing on vocabulary, (b) decoding, (c) monitoring, (d) inferencing, and (e) paraphrasing. Although the same strategies were commonly used by the readers in this study, within as well as across groups, there were, at times, qualitative differences in how these strategies were used by readers of different proficiency levels. These differences were sometimes subtle and, at other times, blatant.

#### *Focusing on Vocabulary*

When using the focusing on vocabulary strategy, readers paid attention to unknown words, identifying problematic vocabulary items. This strategy was frequently used in conjunction with other reading strategies in all three groups, generally monitoring, searching for cognates, paraphrasing, translating, and inferencing. However, the middle-proficiency group used this strategy more extensively than the other two groups.

Readers in the low-proficiency group tended to notice words that repeatedly appeared in the text, although they were less successful than the middle-proficiency and high-proficiency groups at using this strategy to support comprehension. When used on its own, this strategy was not enough to solve a difficulty, and readers in the low-proficiency group were ready to move on or give up more quickly than readers in the two other groups. For example, after focusing on the words *pequeño*, which means small, and *musulmana*, which means Muslim, Participant 15 could not make sense of the paragraph and, quite explicitly, gave up:

Uh, a un pequeño porcentaje de filipinos se les permite divorcie-divorciarse. Alright, a weird, pequeño... a weird pequeño... pequeño percentage of the Philippines. A weird... no, a small. A small. Oh! A small percentage of the Philippines permits divorce. El five percent de la población que es musul-mana y um... so the, uh, el five percent of the population, musulmana? No. El five percent of the population which is Muslim... that's as close as I can get with this word, I don't know what this is.

Readers in the middle-proficiency group used their focus on vocabulary somewhat differently, often recognizing the form of certain verbs, if not the meaning. This strategy, however, was most efficiently and successfully used by readers in the high-proficiency group, who used it in combination with other reading comprehension strategies. Readers in this group were also more persistent and made more attempts at fixing comprehension problems by focusing on a word or phrase that was problematic. Some particularly problematic words such as *estructuras*, *paupérrimas* and *obispos* all appeared in the same paragraph. Participant 32 used some monitoring and some decoding as well:

Uh, viviendas tienen estructura espalperimas. Almost all families, numerous families, uh... are living... (pauses) Have, tienen istructuras, have structures, or have lessons, uh, I don't know what pal-perimas is. (...) Cuando los obsipos dice que el divorcio es algo anti-filipino. When the obsipos, bishops? Maybe? When the bishops say that divorce is something anti-Filipino.

### Decoding

Decoding was defined as an attempt to read an unknown word that readers encounter by sounding out and/or dividing a word into parts (e.g., syllables). Decoding was used most frequently by the readers in the low-proficiency group, while the group that used it least was the high-proficiency group. The decoding strategy sometimes overlapped with monitoring, but was often used on its own.

The low-proficiency group used this strategy with an emphasis on pronunciation rather than comprehension. For example, Participant 1 used decoding frequently and the word *católicas* required several attempts to decode:

La meyoría de las personas en Filipinas no son... no son [cat-catoo-lícas] sólo de la boca para afuera. Casi todos son [catico... catoolícos], numerosas familias sias [ver... veviendas] tienen estructiuras [para-permias], lenan las iglasias los domingos. Cuando los [a-obispos] dicen que el divorcido es algo anti-filipino y que [legas, or... lligalizarlo...] actually, I don't know how to pronounce that word... la institución del matrimonio, la gente escuchó con sumo serdida.

While participants in all three groups used this strategy similarly, breaking down words into more manageable chunks, the low-proficiency group tended to stop and restart the attempt, or repeat words more often than readers in the other groups. The low-proficiency group was also more likely to consider moving on without further attempts at comprehension once a word was decoded.

The high-proficiency group was more likely to decode words successfully on the first attempt, as well as more likely to divide words into syllables aligned with the Spanish pronunciation. Further, the total number of words decoded per paragraph was lowest in the high-proficiency group, and these participants tended to decode multisyllabic words with four or more syllables more often than shorter words. However, many of the same words proved to be difficult for readers across all proficiency groups, among them *católicas*, *viviendas*, *paupérrimas*, *mayoría*, *psicólogo*, *psicológicas*, *discapacidad*, *matrimonio*, *abiertamente*, *estructuras*, *legalizarlo*, *musulmana*, and *población*.

### *Monitoring*

Monitoring as a reading comprehension strategy is the reader's recognition that comprehension failed or did not occur and often took the form of the reader simply stating that he/she did not understand something. Readers in the low-proficiency group used monitoring most frequently, and it was sometimes used in combination with decoding, inferencing, searching for cognates, translating, and using prior knowledge.

Monitoring by the low-proficiency group consisted primarily of stating that a word was unknown to the reader, focusing more on pronunciation than meaning. Further, for readers in the low-proficiency group, the use of the monitoring strategy was less likely to lead to other strategies; once the monitoring statement was made and the difficulty was acknowledged, readers were frequently ready to move on. For example, Participant 1 repeatedly made statements like "Uh, I don't know how to pronounce that." and "actually, I don't know how to pronounce that word..." These comments were a way of making the participant's struggle with the reading more evident, but they did not lead to any other strategies or trigger attempts at working on the unknown words. It was simply a way of stating that this was difficult and that it was time to move on.

The low-proficiency group was also more likely to dismiss inferencing attempts by framing their guesses with two monitoring statements such as "I don't know". This dismissal was also observed in the middle- and high-proficiency groups, but not as often. Both the low- and middle-proficiency groups used monitoring as a way of listing unknown words and they often failed to use other strategies to solve comprehension problems.

Further, monitoring was used as a concluding statement that applied to sections of or whole paragraphs. In the middle- and high-proficiency groups, it was more likely to find monitoring statements in Spanish, or alternating statements in Spanish and English. The middle- and high-proficiency groups were also more likely to use the monitoring strategy to communicate that the meaning of a word or phrase was in fact known to them. Finally, the dismissal of inferencing statements and listing of unknown words was less common in the high-proficiency group compared to the other two groups.

### *Inferencing*

The inferencing strategy consisted of participants making guesses about the meaning of certain words or phrases, often accompanied by words like "maybe",

“possibly”, “so”, and at times more certain attempts such as “this must mean” and “I would say that is...”. In a few cases, inferencing looked more like a decision that the participant made about a particular guess, using phrases like “I am going to assume this means...”

Readers in the middle-proficiency group used inferencing most frequently while readers in the low-proficiency group used inferencing with the least frequency. Regardless, this strategy was often used in combination with monitoring and searching for cognates. However, the low-proficiency group was less likely to succeed in combining these strategies because they focused on the way words looked and let their assumptions about cognates dominate their inferences more frequently than the other two groups.

Readers in the low-proficiency group also used inferencing to fill in gaps, to make assumptions about words or phrases more explicit, and to indicate that the attempt was considered to be good enough. Finally, the high-proficiency group used inferencing to summarize thoughts at the end of paragraphs, as well as to confirm that certain assumptions about the text were either correct or incorrect. For example, as used by Participant 39: “consequir, I don’t remember what that means, but basically... I’m guessing in context it means you can... in the... you can annul the marriage if you have money.”

Participant 42 used the inferencing strategy to provide comments at the end of each paragraph, both summarizing his thoughts and confirming that his assumptions were correct and fit with the paragraph:

Es resultado es un... that’s a typo or something... umm... (clicks tongue) is a system that divides the population in two groups, los ricos pueden volver a casarse y los pobres no. Can marry again? Rich people can marry again? and poor people can’t (clicks tongue)... um.. ok, I don’t get why. Huh, so I guess poor people never get divorced? So, they just stay married I guess... (clicks tongue)

### *Paraphrasing*

The paraphrasing strategy was defined as readers rephrasing an idea using different wording. Paraphrasing was most frequently used by the middle-proficiency group, while the low-proficiency group used it with the least frequency. This strategy sometimes appeared in combination with translating, monitoring, and inferencing.

Typically, paraphrasing consisted of rewording or repeating a thought from the text as a way to try out the ideas until they fit the paragraph in a way that the readers considered satisfactory. Another use of this strategy involved rewording or repetition, but from a thought *about* the text, which the participants used to make sense of the text’s intent or message. Sometimes paraphrasing focused on finding matching verb tenses for a thought in English, helping readers make sense of what the Spanish text was communicating.

Some readers, particularly those from the middle- and high-proficiency groups, used paraphrasing more extensively than others, sometimes to the point that it was the main way to approach a paragraph. Finally, readers from the high-proficiency group were more likely to use paraphrasing as a way of concluding their thoughts or making a decision about how certain words or phrases fit the context.



Participant 40, from the high-proficiency group, used this strategy to address minor changes in meaning by making subtle adjustments to the phrasing of a specific sentence: “Without a doubt, this is... nevertheless this is... a country where a third of the population lives with less than a dollar a day. The annulation of the matrimony (sniffs), marriage is simply an alternative... an expensive alternative... too expensive of an alternative.”

## **Bilingual Strategies**

Four possible bilingual strategies were coded: translating, transferring, searching for cognates, and code-switching. However, due to space limitations, this section focuses on the two bilingual strategies that were most frequently used by readers in all three groups: translating and searching for cognates.

### *Translating*

Translating was the most widely used reading comprehension strategy, and almost all readers in this study used it. It was often used in combination with monitoring, searching for cognates, inferencing, and focusing on vocabulary. The middle-proficiency group used this strategy more frequently compared to the low- and high-proficiency groups.

The low- and middle-proficiency groups tended to focus more on words that looked or sounded like a word they knew in English when translating, and they were more likely than the high-proficiency group to make assumptions about false cognates when translating. For example, Participant 9 assumed that the word *país*, which means country, was a cognate for the English word *past*: “Para un paes en el que el divorcio no está... permito, I know the word permito is, um, permitted. I think paes is past and divorcio is divorce, so divorce was not permitted in the past?”

Another common use of the translating strategy in the low-proficiency group was the listing of words the readers knew as they read the text, making monitoring statements or skipping the words that they did not know. In a way, participants in the low-proficiency group used the translating strategy to take inventory of those words that they were indeed able to translate, and to question the words that posed a challenge. Participant 4 offered an example of this: “La principal forma de hacerlo es... the forma principal es, something about having money (...) Conseguir el matrimonio se anuludo... something about matrimony.”

Readers in the middle- and high-proficiency groups were more likely to read through a whole sentence or even a whole paragraph before attempting translation. Participants in the middle- and high- proficiency groups were also more likely to self-correct while translating than participants in the low- proficiency group.

In addition, participants in the middle- and high-proficiency groups were more likely to make accurate guesses about word meanings than participants in the low-proficiency group. The same words and phrases proved to be difficult to translate for readers across all groups; however, the readers in the high- proficiency group were generally more successful at navigating these words and phrases. Readers in the high-proficiency group tended to translate more smoothly and with less hesitation compared to readers in the other two groups.



Further, readers in the high-proficiency group were more likely to use synonyms of cognates when translating if they considered that they fit the context better than the cognate itself. For example, Participant 31 used the word *handicap* in the context of a physical disability when most readers would have translated this as *incapacity*, which is closer to the Spanish word *discapacidad*, but does not apply as well or is not as acceptable in this context due to its implications.

### *Searching for Cognates*

The searching for cognates strategy was most frequently used by readers in the low-proficiency group, with the high-proficiency group using this strategy with the least frequency. This strategy often overlapped with translating, although not all translating involved searching for cognates. Monitoring, inferencing, and focusing on vocabulary were strategies frequently used in combination with searching for cognates.

Sometimes, the participants' search for cognates relied more on how certain words sounded than on how they looked. The low- and middle-proficiency groups tended to have the same problems with false cognates, often mistranslating the same words based on how they sounded or looked rather than their relation to the topic. For example, Participant 17, from the middle-proficiency group, used the strategy in this way without paying attention to the context of the reading: "demasiado, which makes me think of demise", "listening with... suma seriedad. Which makes me think serious.", and "hm, desearían makes me think dessert..."

Readers in the middle- and high-proficiency groups were more likely to identify true cognates compared to readers in the low-proficiency group, although readers across all groups made some of the same incorrect assumptions about words. Some of the most common problematic words, however, were resolved more successfully by readers that used this strategy in the high-proficiency group compared to the middle- and low-proficiency groups. For example, Participant 33 focused on a word that many readers found extremely confusing by first making a monitoring statement, then acknowledging that the word was unknown to him, and later searching for cognates: "I don't know what paupérrimas means. Who have... It—it looks like pauper, like, whose lives have the structure of what's typically...poor people?"

## **Discussion**

### *Reading Comprehension Strategies*

The first research question determined which reading comprehension strategies students who were beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners of Spanish as a second/foreign language used when they approached a text in Spanish. This question led to two findings. First, regardless of proficiency level, the readers in this study tended to use the same set of reading comprehension strategies when they read the text. Second, there were qualitative differences in how these strategies were used by readers of different proficiency levels.

The focusing on vocabulary strategy was used by the readers in the low-proficiency group as a way to notice words that were repeated throughout the text, but this strategy rarely resolved comprehension problems when used on its own. However, when used by the high-proficiency group, focusing on a word or phrase even-

tually led to solving a comprehension problem. Their success may be due to the fact that focusing on vocabulary was used in combination with other strategies and the readers in the high-proficiency group were more persistent in their attempts at fixing comprehension problems.

Findings from this study echo those by Nassaji (2004), who also used think alouds to identify the degree and types of strategies used by readers and found that second language readers who had stronger vocabulary knowledge utilized certain strategies more frequently than those who had weaker vocabulary knowledge. Readers from the high-proficiency group also made a better use of the focusing on vocabulary strategy, especially when used in combination with inferencing, compared to the readers in the low-proficiency group. Similarly, Nassaji (2004) found that second language readers with strong vocabulary knowledge made more effective use of inferencing strategies compared to weaker readers, and their depth of vocabulary had a significant contribution to success over the contribution made by the learners' degree of strategy use. However, because the present study did not focus on the degree of success in which these strategies resulted, it cannot be stated that they led to overall better comprehension for one group over another. This is perhaps an area for future exploration.

Vocabulary is important to comprehension, and some words proved to be difficult to pronounce and comprehend for readers in all groups. However, the way in which readers of different proficiency levels approached vocabulary varied. Readers in the low-proficiency group used decoding most frequently, while readers in the high-proficiency group used it with the least frequency. Readers in the low-proficiency group tended to focus on pronunciation rather than word meaning and were more likely to move on without further attempts to comprehend once a word was decoded. Although the high-proficiency group also used the decoding strategy, it was usually to decode multisyllabic words, and they were frequently more successful in their first attempt to read those words. These findings suggest that less proficient readers have fewer resources to fix comprehension problems despite using some strategies more frequently than more proficient readers.

Monitoring was a strategy used by all participants, and it refers to the readers' awareness of the extent to which they understand a text while they read (Baker & Brown, 1984a, 1984b). If readers comprehend the text, they do not need to adjust their processing or thinking, but if they recognize that relevant information is missing or the meaning is obscured, they need to implement strategies to help their comprehension, like rereading text or reprocessing certain sections of the reading. Comprehension monitoring is a prerequisite for the effective use of comprehension strategies (Morrison, 2004; Wang, 2016). Readers of all proficiency groups used monitoring, although in qualitatively different ways. Readers in the low-proficiency group used this strategy to state if a word's meaning was unknown to them and, at times, to monitor pronunciation over meaning. On the other hand, both the low-proficiency and middle-proficiency groups used the monitoring strategy as a way to make a list of unknown words, but it rarely led to the use of other strategies to support comprehension. Readers in the high-proficiency group were more likely to use it in combination with other strategies to support comprehension. These findings support the notion that readers with lower levels of proficiency are aware of difficulties and verbalize monitoring but they lack the knowledge and resources to

successfully address comprehension problems.

Inferencing helps learners decide when and how to make choices about proceeding, when to get assistance from the context, and when to use vocabulary knowledge (Huckin & Bloch, 1993; Paribakht & Wesche, 1999). So, a main factor that affects inferencing is the ability to effectively use contextual clues (Huang, 2018; Huckin & Bloch, 1993; Nagy, 1997; Nagy et al, 1987; Nagy & Scott, 2000), and using contextual clues depends on having sufficient vocabulary knowledge (Coady et al, 1993; Nation, 1993). Frantzen (2003) found that learners with stronger linguistic knowledge benefit from using context more than learners who have weaker vocabulary skills. Similarly, Kern (1989) found that the learners' language proficiency influences inferencing strategy use. Findings from this study support several of these points about inferencing. For example, the low-proficiency group used inferencing less often than the other groups, possibly because these readers did not have enough vocabulary knowledge to make good use of the strategy. Instead, this group focused on how words looked in order to make inferences rather than on context clues. Therefore, their inferencing attempts were tied to cognates over context. The high-proficiency group, on the other hand, behaved in a manner consistent with participants in Franzen's (2003) study. That is, the readers in the high-proficiency group used inferencing to both summarize their thoughts at the end of paragraphs and to confirm their assumptions about the text.

Paraphrasing was the reading comprehension strategy that was used most similarly by the readers of different proficiency levels. This strategy consisted of rewording or repeating an idea from the text in different ways until readers felt they had comprehended the idea to the best of their ability. Readers used this strategy as a way to think through difficult sections of the text, regardless of their proficiency level. Even though the high-proficiency group tended to use paraphrasing as a way of concluding their thoughts or making a decision about how certain words or phrases fit the context, there was no major difference on how students reworded sentences.

Overall, readers in all three groups used the same five strategies; however, there were qualitative differences in how these groups implemented most of them. This distinction is important because, as Sarig (1987) argues, good strategies do not necessarily equal good comprehension. Similarly, Anderson (1991) and Wang (2016) state that it is possible for both proficient and less proficient readers to use the same strategies with different results. The usual assumption about comprehension is that new information becomes part of the readers' permanent cognitive knowledge by building on pre-existing information (Bernhardt, 1991; Lee & VanPatten, 1995). Nonetheless, the fact that readers process text in similar or different ways does not automatically imply that they also interpret text in the same way. Second language readers who interact with the same text in similar ways could comprehend the passage differently; conversely, second language readers who interact with the text in different ways could comprehend at the same level.

### *Bilingual Strategies*

The second research question focused on determining when and how students used their first language, English, when they encountered reading or comprehension difficulties in a Spanish text. This question led to three findings. First, regardless of proficiency level, the readers in this study used bilingual strategies when read-

ing the text. Second, searching for cognates and translating were the two bilingual strategies that were most commonly used by readers in all three groups. Third, there were qualitative differences in how readers of different proficiency levels used the bilingual strategies.

Almost all readers in the study used translating to some extent, and some participants used it as their only bilingual strategy, though most used it in combination with other strategies. The way in which this strategy was used varied by group. For example, the low-proficiency group used translating to list the meaning of words they knew, and it rarely supported comprehension since listing separate words rarely led to connected ideas about the text. On the other hand, readers in the middle-proficiency and high-proficiency groups tended to read an entire sentence, sometimes an entire paragraph, before translating, which did lead to more connected ideas and it made them more aware of challenging words. Further, the low-proficiency and middle-proficiency groups tended to focus more on words that looked or sounded like a word they knew in English when translating and this was more likely to make incorrect assumptions about words that were seemingly cognates. On the other hand, the high-proficiency group, who had more vocabulary knowledge, tended to use translating more effectively. Readers in the middle-proficiency and high-proficiency group also tended to self-correct more when translating the text. Further, even though the same words were challenging for readers in all groups when translating, the readers in the high-proficiency group tended to make more accurate assumptions about certain word meanings, presumably because they were able to draw from context, prior knowledge, and vocabulary. Lastly, readers in the high-proficiency group tended to more easily read a sentence in Spanish and then smoothly translate that sentence in English compared to the other two groups.

In sum, readers in this study relied on translation or using their first language to understand the text, which aligns with previous research. That is, many second language readers spend much of their time thinking about L2 texts in their L1, regardless of what languages are involved or the readers' level of language proficiencies (Ahmadian et al, 2016; Kern, 1994; Lee, 1986a, 1986b; Saengpakdeejit & Intaraprasert, 2014; Turnbull & Sweetnam Evans, 2017; Upton, 1997; Upton & Lee-Thompson, 2001). Further, like this study, some studies suggest that using the first language might be a way for readers to confirm their understanding of the text or to store what they comprehend in a more efficient way; other studies suggest that this may simply be the readers' "language of thought" (Lee, 1986a, 1986b; Moll, 1988; Upton & Lee-Thompson, 2001).

Searching for cognates was the other bilingual strategy that was commonly used by readers of all proficiency levels in this study; however, readers in the low-proficiency group used this strategy more frequently than the other two groups. At times, these readers tended to rely more on how certain words sounded than on how they looked to make assumptions about cognates. Also, the low-proficiency and the middle-proficiency groups were more likely to be misled by false cognates, although some readers in the middle-proficiency group tended to identify true cognates more frequently than readers in the low-proficiency group. This is not surprising since transfer of cognates requires a certain degree of awareness on the part of the reader as not all words that look or sound alike are cognates. As Tindall and Nisbet (2010)

found, false cognates are a source of misunderstanding and confusion for second language readers, which was the case with the less proficient readers in this study.

Readers in the high-proficiency group used this strategy less frequently than the other groups, which is consistent with the notion that the degree to which learners rely on their first language, such as cognates and translating, seems to decline as their proficiency in the second language increases (Upton & Lee-Thompson, 2001). That is, higher proficiency students used cognates and translation less frequently when reading the L2 text than did students of lower proficiency. This study partially supports this in that the readers in the high-proficiency group used cognates much less frequently than the lower proficiency readers. However, unlike previous research, the readers in the high-proficiency group frequently used translation when reading the Spanish text.

## **Implications, Limitations, and Future Research**

### *Implications for Instruction*

Based on this study and its findings, relevant information regarding reading instruction can help guide next steps. Since this study did not find a clear continuum of strategies among low, middle, and high-proficiency readers, the same strategies could be addressed and emphasized at all levels, explicitly teaching students when to use a specific strategy to solve a comprehension problem, how to use certain strategies more successfully, and how to combine them with other strategies that might help fix the problem.

If the same set of strategies were emphasized during reading instruction, then students of different levels of proficiency could develop them as they progress through their language studies. Furthermore, educators who understand what readers of different proficiency levels do—and what they need to do to be successful in their reading efforts—will be more likely to attend to their students' specific needs, helping them move toward achieving higher levels of reading and language proficiency.

### *Limitations of the Study*

This study has several limitations that are related to both methodology and cultural factors. First, because the think aloud data was collected in a single 50-minute session, these results reflect but a portion of what readers do when they approach a text in Spanish. What's more, because all readers worked with the same text, assumptions cannot be made about what these same readers would do if they were presented with a different text, a text of a different genre, length, or complexity. In addition, because students who participated in this study read and thought aloud in a test situation, these findings might not reflect what readers really do when they read Spanish texts in the "real world," not in a language lab, or when doing silent reading.

A second limitation is tied to the nature of think aloud protocols. Although they have been used successfully to explore different reading processes in second language, Block (1986) argued that think alouds are most useful when they provide information about the learners' reading processes as they have trouble understanding what they are reading. Nevertheless, they are not as useful to study processes that are already automatic or cannot be easily verbalized by learners. There might have been reading processes that participants were engaging in that were not observed,

due to the nature of the method used for the study. Even if these processes took place during the reading but participants did not verbalize them, assumptions cannot be made about thoughts they did not articulate.

A third limitation is related to cultural factors. Since the participants in this study read a text about a culturally unfamiliar topic, they may have relied on different strategies than they would have used had the topic been culturally familiar. Furthermore, the readers in this study might have been able to use their background knowledge more heavily if they had been reading a culturally familiar text.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

The present study identified the reading comprehension strategies that adult learners of different levels of proficiency used to read a single text in Spanish, the second language they were learning. Future research might explore whether there is a connection between strategies used by readers of different proficiency levels and the extent to which they comprehend an L2 text. Also, research might examine whether successful L2 readers and struggling L2 readers use the same or different strategies. Further, future studies might include tasks in the readers' first language to determine whether they use the same reading comprehension strategies in both languages, and whether they use them with the same results. Research might also examine whether other types of text genres make a difference in which comprehension strategies readers use to read them. Finally, future research might focus not only on identifying strategies but also on determining if they are successfully used by readers, meaning whether they actually lead to better comprehension over other possible strategies.

This study intends to provide insight into the reading comprehension strategies that second language learners of different proficiency levels use when reading a text in the L2. It may also provide guidance to instructors, researchers, curriculum planners, and foreign language program directors for how they might support the reading comprehension of second language learners.

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**Appendix A: Descriptive Statistics for Itemized Strategies Used**

Task	Group	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Focusing on Vocabulary	Low	15	3.00	2.828	0	7
	Middle	15	4.13	1.807	0	7
	High	15	2.93	2.219	0	7
	Total	45	3.36	2.337	0	7
Summarizing	Low	15	.47	.640	0	2
	Middle	15	.20	.414	0	1
	High	15	.40	.632	0	2
	Total	45	.36	.570	0	2
Rereading	Low	15	.87	1.356	0	5
	Middle	15	.80	1.014	0	3
	High	15	.67	.900	0	3
	Total	45	.78	1.085	0	5
Paraphrasing	Low	15	1.93	1.792	0	6
	Middle	15	2.73	1.624	0	6
	High	15	2.60	2.098	0	7
	Total	45	2.42	1.840	0	7
Using Context Clues	Low	15	0.00	0.000	0	0
	Middle	15	0.00	0.000	0	0
	High	15	.13	.352	0	1
	Total	45	.04	.208	0	1
Decoding	Low	15	5.27	2.658	0	8
	Middle	15	4.73	2.463	1	8
	High	15	2.73	1.907	0	7
	Total	45	4.24	2.560	0	8
Inferencing	Low	15	2.27	1.944	0	6
	Middle	15	3.00	1.732	0	7
	High	15	2.47	1.807	0	5
	Total	45	2.58	1.815	0	7
Questioning	Low	15	.13	.352	0	1
	Middle	15	.13	.352	0	1
	High	15	.60	.910	0	3
	Total	45	.29	.626	0	3
Confirming/ Disconfirming	Low	15	.13	.352	0	1
	Middle	15	.13	.516	0	2
	High	15	.13	.352	0	1
	Total	45	.13	.405	0	2

Integrating Information	Low	15	.07	.258	0	1
	Middle	15	.27	.594	0	2
	High	15	.33	.724	0	2
	Total	45	.22	.560	0	2
Invoking Prior Knowledge	Low	15	.73	1.033	0	3
	Middle	15	1.00	1.069	0	3
	High	15	.40	.632	0	2
	Total	45	.71	.944	0	3
Monitoring	Low	15	5.20	3.144	0	8
	Middle	15	4.13	2.532	0	8
	High	15	3.53	2.532	0	8
	Total	45	4.29	2.777	0	8
Evaluating	Low	15	.73	1.907	0	7
	Middle	15	.07	.258	0	1
	High	15	.67	.900	0	3
	Total	45	.49	1.236	0	7
Searching for Cognates	Low	15	4.00	2.619	0	7
	Middle	15	4.07	2.052	0	8
	High	15	1.93	1.624	0	5
	Total	45	3.33	2.316	0	8
Translating	Low	15	6.40	3.158	0	8
	Middle	15	7.13	2.134	0	8
	High	15	5.87	3.399	0	8
	Total	45	6.47	2.928	0	8
Code-switching	Low	15	.33	1.291	0	5
	Middle	15	.07	.258	0	1
	High	15	.13	.352	0	1
	Total	45	.18	.777	0	5
Transferring	Low	15	0.00	0.000	0	0
	Middle	15	.07	.258	0	1
	High	15	.67	2.059	0	8
	Total	45	.24	1.209	0	8
Demonstrating Awareness	Low	15	.20	.414	0	1
	Middle	15	.07	.258	0	1
	High	15	.07	.258	0	1
	Total	45	.11	.318	0	1
Noticing Novelty	Low	15	.07	.258	0	1
	Middle	15	0.00	0.000	0	0
	High	15	0.00	0.000	0	0
	Total	45	.02	.149	0	1

Appendix B: ANOVA for Itemized Strategies Used

Strategy		df	SS	MS	F	p
Focusing on Vocabulary	Between Groups	2	13.644	6.822	1.264	.293
	Within Groups	42	226.667	5.397		
	Total	44	240.311			
Summarizing	Between Groups	2	.578	.289	.883	.421
	Within Groups	42	13.733	.327		
	Total	44	14.311			
Rereading	Between Groups	2	.311	.156	.127	.881
	Within Groups	42	51.467	1.225		
	Total	44	51.778			
Paraphrasing	Between Groups	2	5.511	2.756	.807	.453
	Within Groups	42	143.467	3.416		
	Total	44	148.978			
Using Context Clues	Between Groups	2	.178	.089	2.154	.129
	Within Groups	42	1.733	.041		
	Total	44	1.911			
Decoding	Between Groups	2	53.511	26.756	4.786	.013
	Within Groups	42	234.800	5.590		
	Total	44	288.311			
Inferencing	Between Groups	2	4.311	2.156	.644	.530
	Within Groups	42	140.667	3.349		
	Total	44	144.978			
Questioning	Between Groups	2	2.178	1.089	3.035	.059
	Within Groups	42	15.067	.359		
	Total	44	17.244			
Confirming/Disconfirming	Between Groups	2	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000
	Within Groups	42	7.200	.171		
	Total	44	7.200			
Integrating Information	Between Groups	2	.578	.289	.919	.407
	Within Groups	42	13.200	.314		
	Total	44	13.778			
Invoking Prior Knowledge	Between Groups	2	2.711	1.356	1.558	.222
	Within Groups	42	36.533	.870		
	Total	44	39.244			

Monitoring	Between Groups	2	21.378	10.689	1.412	.255
	Within Groups	42	317.867	7.568		
	Total	44	339.244			
Evaluating	Between Groups	2	4.044	2.022	1.344	.272
	Within Groups	42	63.200	1.505		
	Total	44	67.244			
Searching for Cognates	Between Groups	2	44.133	22.067	4.830	.013
	Within Groups	42	191.867	4.568		
	Total	44	236.000			
Translating	Between Groups	2	12.133	6.067	.698	.503
	Within Groups	42	365.067	8.692		
	Total	44	377.200			
Code-switching	Between Groups	2	.578	.289	.467	.630
	Within Groups	42	26.000	.619		
	Total	44	26.578			
Transferring	Between Groups	2	4.044	2.022	1.409	.256
	Within Groups	42	60.267	1.435		
	Total	44	64.311			
Demonstrating Awareness	Between Groups	2	.178	.089	.875	.424
	Within Groups	42	4.267	.102		
	Total	44	4.444			
Noticing Novelty	Between Groups	2	.044	.022	1.000	.376
	Within Groups	42	.933	.022		
	Total	44	.978			

# An Investigation of Teacher Practices for the Instruction of French as a Third Language among Spanish-Speaking Students

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## **Abstract**

*World Language (WL) instruction in the U.S. can no longer be aimed toward a monolingual English speaker acquiring a second language (L2). Secondary students who take WL courses may speak a variety of languages, bringing their home language and culture into the classroom. Spanish is the second most commonly spoken language in the U.S. and many Hispanic students are enrolled in Georgia public schools, where this research study took place. However, it is presently unknown to what degree WL teachers are equipped to teach a third language (L3) to students who are bilingual or Heritage speakers of Spanish. The authors attempted to uncover secondary-level French teachers' preparation and training with this unique population of learners. A survey was administered to 100 Georgia French teachers and follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 survey respondents. Data were analyzed qualitatively and the results indicated that French teachers do not receive sufficient training on L3 instruction as pre-service teachers nor do they have adequate professional development opportunities as in-service teachers to learn research-based strategies for teaching French as an L3 to Spanish-speaking students.*

**Key words:** *French language instruction, bilingualism, heritage learners, multilingualism, teacher education.*

## **Introduction**

Currently, there is a growing number of bilingual students in the U.S. who engage in world language (WL) study at the secondary level. Unlike their monolingual peers, these students are engaging in the process of third language (L3) acquisition. Several scholars have asserted that multilingualism, or the ability to speak multiple languages, has a positive influence on the language acquisition process (Bild & Swain, 1989; Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Muñoz, 2000). Furthermore, prior research suggests that bilingualism empowers students to succeed both in school and in life (Bialystok, 2001; Bild & Swain, 1989; Cenoz, 2000; Dewaele & Wei, 2012; Kharkhurin, 2010; Muñoz, 2000; Sanz, 2000).



While research on multilingual and plurilingual language learning has been conducted in Asia (Duan, 2011; Feng & Adamson, 2015; Kärchner-Ober, 2012), Canada (Bild & Swain, 1989; Tavares, 2000; Tremblay, 2006), and Europe (Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Rauch, Naumann, & Jude, 2011), studies on these populations of learners are lacking in U.S. contexts. This may be due to the fact that the English language has historically served as a lingua franca, or common language of communication, for business and education among speakers of different languages in the U.S. and abroad. The U.S. ideology, with its prior colonial history, has traditionally required linguistic assimilation of all minority groups, supporting the value of English as a dominant language (Kloss, 1998). One of the few studies conducted in the U.S. context (Thomas, 1988) compared English monolinguals to Spanish-English bilinguals for the acquisition of French at the university level. She found that bilingual Spanish-speaking students had greater metalinguistic awareness, which gave them an advantage over their monolingual peers. Despite the fact that research findings support the benefits of bilingualism on L3 learning (Bialystok, 2001; Cenoz, 2000; Muñoz, 2000; Sanz, 2000), many Spanish-speaking students continue to fail high school WL courses (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). Therefore, secondary-level WL teachers may be in need of additional preparation and training for teaching bilingual students an L3 in order for them to better support this unique population of learners.

The purpose of the present study was to examine French teachers' prior training and preparation for teaching high school French to bilingual or Heritage speakers of Spanish. Thus far, the vast majority of research on WL teaching and learning has been conducted with learners who are monolingual speakers acquiring a second language (L2). This study fills a gap in the present body of knowledge on L3 instruction at the secondary level in a U.S. context.

## **Literature Review**

### **Bilingualism and Research on L3 Learners**

The fields of bilingualism and second language acquisition provide the theoretical framework for the current research on L3 acquisition. While L2 and L3 acquisition share many common features, each language that an individual learns has the ability to influence later language acquisition processes. There are a number of L3 learning models that have attempted to explain the phenomenon of multiple language acquisition; however, the present study adhered to the factor model and the multilingual processing model frameworks, both of which are explained below.

#### *The Factor Model*

Hufeisen and Marx (2007) proposed a factor model that attempts to explain how L3 learners build on their previous knowledge of language to support further language learning. According to this model, the factors that contribute to the acquisition of the first language (L1), the L2, the L3, and any other languages that are learned are described chronologically. As learners move from one language to another, the factors add up, thereby helping the learner acquire each additional language more efficiently and effectively.

The six factors that influence the language learning process include: neurophysiological, external, affective, cognitive, language specific, and linguistic factors (see Figure 1).

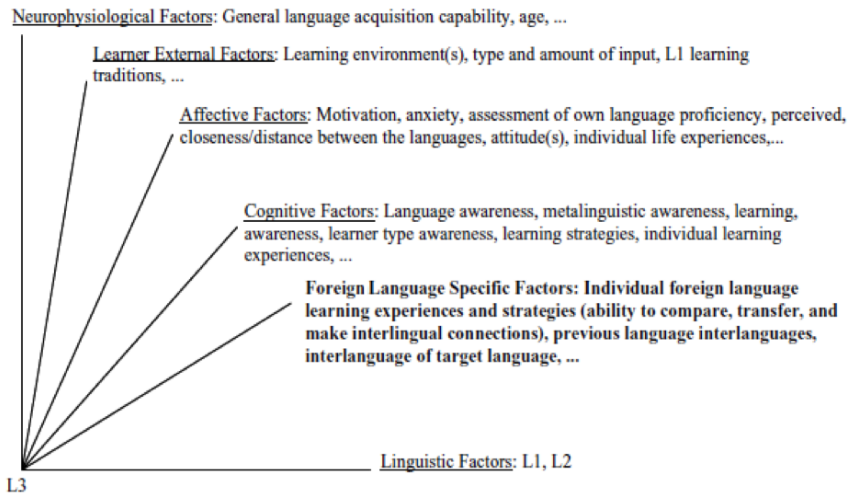


Figure 1. The Factor Model of L3 Learning (Hufeisen & Marx, 2007)

According to the model, the most benefits are derived from linguistic factors such as learners' individual experiences, strategies and techniques that were utilized during previous language learning, and knowledge of the L1 and L2. Hufeisen (2004) asserted that foreign language specific factors may be more predominant in some L3 learners, while being irrelevant for other learners, likely because every language learner has different cognitive abilities, learning experiences, motivation, and emotional reactions and anxieties when learning a new language. Prior research has examined the following learners' individual traits, which have been shown to have the greatest impact on language learning: aptitude, motivation, personality types (such as extraversion and introversion), temperament, risk-taking, intelligence, anxiety, creativity, and self-esteem (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2008; Skehan, 1991). For example, Furnham's (1990) study demonstrated that extraverts are more talkative and more fluent speakers than introverts. Therefore, learners have their own way of building a repertoire of successful strategies and techniques that are effective given their unique cognitive and personality traits. However, the same strategies and techniques that are helpful for some L3 learners may be ineffective for others. Thus, Hufeisen and Marx' Factor Model is highly dependent upon an individual's unique traits and experiences.

### *The Multilingual Processing Model*

Meissner (2004) set forth the multilingual processing model to explain L3 acquisition while simultaneously helping speakers of Romance languages to build a stronger linguistic foundation in which to foster the language acquisition process. Meissner (2004) asserted that learners who have already mastered one Latin-based L2 will approach L3 written and oral discourse that is Latin-based through the lens of the L2. In other words, knowledge of the previously learned Latin-based L2 helps learners build their own hypotheses about how the new Latin-based L3 works. At the

beginning stages of L3 acquisition, the learner relies heavily on the grammatical and lexical systems of the previous languages learned, selecting either the L1 or the L2 depending on the closeness and similarities with the target language (TL). As learners grow more confident and proficient in the TL, their language learning hypotheses are constantly revised and developed toward the systems of the TL. Thus, each multilingual language learner constantly formulates, tests, rejects, and approves theories regarding how the L3 works. This process is known as a spontaneous grammar and Meissner (2004) asserted that the following conditions must be met for a spontaneous grammar to exist: (1) the languages must be typologically related, (2) the learner must be proficient in the L1 and L2, and (3) the learner must be instructed on how to use L1 and L2 knowledge for L3 acquisition. The pedagogical implications are the greatest for the last condition because simply knowing two or more languages of the same group is insufficient for successful L3 acquisition; rather, multilingual learners must be instructed and coached on how to tap into and appropriately use their previous linguistic knowledge to their advantage as well as how to build their receptivity for further language learning.

Overall, prior research supports the assertion that the L3 acquisition process is facilitated by prior L1 and L2 learning experiences (Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Jessner, 1999; Thomas, 1988) due to the fact that multilinguals have developed a repertoire of language learning strategies and metalinguistic awareness (Thomas, 1988). Therefore, the tenets of the multilingual processing model (Meissner, 2004) suggest that L3 learners who already have advantages in language learning should benefit from strategy training to help them activate their prior language skills to advance their acquisition of the L3.

### **Research on General Strategy Use and Strategy Instruction**

Each language learner is unique and learns at his or her own pace, which is largely determined by factors such as motivation, the instructional context, cognitive and affective individual differences, and the quantity and quality of the TL input among others. Individual differences, such as motivation, aptitude, age, socioeconomic status, and language background are closely related to the language learning strategies that students may employ to make their language learning easier, faster, more efficient, and/or more self-directed (Oxford, 1999). Some researchers have investigated the traits and qualities of good and bad language learners as well as what specific strategies are used among specific populations of learners such as males, immigrant students, and L3 learners (Dewaele, 2005; Griffiths, 2003; Lee & Oxford, 2008; Oxford, 1999; Reis, 1985; Rubin, 1975). Those individuals who are deemed good language learners often display the following traits and characteristics:

- They learn from their own mistakes
- They make guesses willingly and accurately
- They engage in TL practice frequently
- They have a strong desire to communicate in the TL
- They attend to both form and meaning
- They monitor their own speech and that of others (Rubin, 1975).

Naiman, Frölich, Stern, and Todesco (1978) found that addressing the affective demands of language learning as well as learning to think in the TL are qualities of good language learners due to their increased self-awareness and autonomy. When language learners take responsibility for their own learning, they also seek more opportunities to apply language skills outside of the formal classroom. Hence, good language learners build upon classroom language experience in informal settings while communicating in the TL.

Good language learners also engage in strategy use, which has been shown to correlate with improved performance in several different aspects of language learning, such as reading speaking, listening, and writing (Bialystok, 1981; Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito, & Sumrall, 1993; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Thompson & Rubin, 1993). Several studies have found a positive correlation between frequent strategy use and language learning achievement (Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Furthermore, the appropriate use of strategies has been shown to have a positive effect on learning specific skills, such as vocabulary (Atay & Ozbulgan, 2007; Rasekh & Ranjbary, 2003), reading (Carrell, 1985; Chamot, 2005; Cohen, 1998; Macaro & Erler, 2007; McDonough 1999; Oxford 1996; Zhang, 2008), listening (Graham & Macaro, 2008; Vandergift & Tafaghodtari, 2010), and oral communication (Nakatani, 2005; Naughton, 2006). Moreover, Cohen (1998) and Griffiths (2013) asserted that it is the application of efficient strategies, their extent of use, and the appropriateness of strategy selection—and not the quantity of the strategies used—that distinguish a good language learner from a bad one.

### **Oxford's Strategy System**

While several scholars have set forth different taxonomies for categorizing language learning strategies (Bialystok, 1978; Naiman, Frölich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1987), Oxford's (1990) model of language learning strategies is the most current and comprehensive strategy classification system. Oxford (1990) identified the following six language learning strategies:

- *memory strategies* (relating to how students remember language),
- *cognitive strategies* (relating to how students think about their learning),
- *compensation strategies* (helping students to make up for limited knowledge),
- *metacognitive strategies* (relating to how students manage their own learning),
- *affective strategies* (relating to students' feelings and emotions)
- *social strategies* (involving learning by interaction with others).

#### *Memory Strategies*

Memory-related strategies are the most useful for novice-level language learners because they primarily focus on vocabulary acquisition, while intermediate- and advanced-level learners rely less heavily on memorization because their vocabularies are richer in the TL (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Memory strategies help learners link new information to concepts and/or terms that already exist in their working memories. Some examples of memory strategies include making associations, using body movements and acronyms, and drawing pictures.

### *Cognitive Strategies*

Language learners rely on cognitive strategies to attend to and process new information and to attribute deeper meaning to it. Analyzing, synthesizing, reasoning, finding similarities between the L1 and the L2, and reorganizing information are examples of cognitive strategies. Using the TL in naturalistic settings, such as watching television or listening to music, are also considered to be cognitive strategies because they prompt learners to process language more deeply. Several scholars have asserted that cognitive strategies have a positive effect on learners' proficiency levels (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

### *Compensation Strategies*

Compensation strategies are used to make up for any information that is missing when learners read, write, listen, or speak in the TL. Using the analogy of a missing puzzle piece, learners use paralinguistic cues such as gestures and body language, pausing, rephrasing, guessing, and asking for clarification to understand messages in the TL. While making guesses based on context clues can be attributed to both compensation and cognitive strategies, Oxford asserted that these types of actions are compensatory in nature because they allow learners to fill in gaps in their TL knowledge. Positive correlations have been found between performance in a WL and the use of compensation strategies (Cohen, 1998; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

### *Metacognitive Strategies*

These are the strategies that empower students to organize and plan their language learning. Metacognitive strategies help learners become more self-regulated and autonomous in their learning. Some examples of metacognitive strategies include identifying students' learning styles, needs, and preferences, as well as planning and organizing for learning—including monitoring progress, analyzing mistakes, adjusting goals and tasks, and evaluating learning. Metacognitive strategies have been shown to be strong predictors of successful language learning (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Oxford, 1990; Purpura, 1997). For the present study, metacognitive strategies play the most significant role because they allow students to reflect on their learning and to evaluate the efficacy of the strategies used. For example, bilingual L3 learners may analyze the effectiveness of language transfer from the L1 or the L2 to the L3 and WL teachers can help facilitate this process by explicitly teaching metacognitive strategies.

### *Affective Strategies*

These strategies refer to students' emotions, attitudes, and feelings about the TL and the language learning process. Language anxiety also exerts an influence on students' affect; strategies such as relaxation techniques, rewards, positive self-talk, taking deep breaths, and self-encouragement may help alleviate learners' anxiety and increase their positive feelings about the TL. However, Mullins (1992) claimed that affective strategies play a more important role at the beginning stages of language learning because students with higher levels of proficiency no longer need or use these types of strategies.

### *Social Strategies*

Learners rely on social strategies when they interact with others while learning the TL and culture. Some examples of social strategies include the following: talking with native speakers, asking for language advice and suggestions for improvement, asking clarification questions, and exploring social and cultural norms. The use

of social strategies has been found to correlate positively with successful language learning (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

### **Strategies for Teaching Spanish-Speaking Students**

There is no one-size-fits-all approach for teaching language. Teachers, school administrators, researchers, and policy makers have struggled for decades to find the most optimal way to teach language to children, adolescents, and adults. Educators are required to differentiate their instruction in order to meet the needs of all of their students and to teach diverse groups of students effectively. Unfortunately, not all instructors receive sufficient training in how to do so in their teacher preparation programs. Moreover, teacher preparation programs may also lack specific training on how to instruct bilingual students in an L3; therefore, many language educators attempt to discover their own strategies for instructing this specific population of learners.

Teaching French language students whose primary home language is Spanish is a challenging task that requires WL teachers to have an understanding of the principles of both L2 and L3 theories as well as knowledge of approaches for teaching bilingual and Heritage speakers. Research findings have revealed two major strengths of multilingual students that WL teachers may tap into: (1) cross-linguistic knowledge (Cenoz, 2000) and (2) metalinguistic awareness (Jessner, 1999; Thomas, 1988). These factors may distinguish speakers of multiple languages from monolingual learners. De la Fuente and Lacroix (2015) asserted several practical suggestions for WL teachers that can be summarized as follows:

- Encourage multilingual students to look for similarities between languages and reactivate their prior linguistic knowledge.
- Use contrastive analysis to address differences between languages and avoid negative transfer, especially in languages from the same language group.
- Allow multilingual students act as “languages experts,” explaining and illustrating similarities and differences between languages to their classmates to promote motivation and improve self-image.
- Advise students to reflect upon their previous language learning experience and reapply strategies they used in the past to new learning situations (De la Fuente & Lacroix, 2015, p. 52).

Given the research findings cited above, it appears that that the best practices for teaching an L3 are a combination of cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), linguistic sensitivity (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), strategy training (Oxford, 1990; Richards & Rogers, 1986), and activation of metalinguistic awareness (De Angelis, 2011; Jessner, 2008; Thomas, 1988). It is presently unknown how well secondary teachers of French who teach Hispanic students are trained on these research-based practices.

The present study attempts to fill this gap in the current body of knowledge by investigating the following research question: What type of training do French language teachers report receiving during their teacher preparation programs or as in-service teachers on strategy instruction and language learning strategy use for teaching Spanish-speaking students a third language?

## Methods

### *Context and Participants*

In order to gain a thorough perspective on the different types of training that French teachers may have received on strategy instruction and use for the instruction of French as an L3 to Spanish-speaking students, the initial context of this study consisted of all high school WL teachers in the state of Georgia, where one of the researchers is currently employed as an in-service teacher.

Current data from the Georgia Department of Education states that there are 181 school districts with approximately 2,200 schools in the state (GA Department of Education, 2017). WL instruction is required for a variety of different degrees and programs; given this, there exist a large number of WL programs in the state at the high school level. The largest school districts are located in the urban and suburban areas surrounding the capital city of Atlanta; however, the state varies greatly in geographic and economic characteristics across each region. Therefore, possible participants varied in their locations, educational and cultural backgrounds, levels of education, cultural and linguistic experience, and years of teaching experience.

The majority of students in the state choose to study Spanish, as this is the language most commonly offered at the secondary level and the second most spoken language in the U.S. Subsequently, most schools are able to offer Spanish, with French being the second most studied language, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1

*World Language Courses offered in High Schools in Georgia in 2016-2017*

Language Course	High School Enrollment
Spanish	288,133
French	62,138
Latin	14,814
German	11,821
Chinese	3,169
Japanese	1,190
American Sign Language	1,271
Arabic	264
Portuguese	166
Russian	168
Italian	37
Greek	42
Total	383,213

While the number of students enrolled in Spanish courses are greater than those in French or in other Romance language courses, French is offered in 111 out of the 159 counties in the state, more than the other Romance languages combined—Portuguese is offered in 10 counties, and Italian is offered in 14 counties (Georgia



Department of Education, 2016). According to Cenoz (2000), students who are native or heritage speakers of Spanish have the benefit of access to two similar language systems when studying another Romance language. Bérubé and Marinova-Todd (2012) support this, indicating that languages with similar grammar and writing systems can enhance one another in the learning process. In addition, as Gay (2010) and Potowski and Carreira (2004) have demonstrated, teachers must connect with bilingual students by understanding their unique needs and challenges, as well as how to demonstrate respect for their home languages and cultures. Thus, training in strategy instruction and use for those teaching French as an L3 to native or heritage speakers of Spanish could be an important element in classrooms with significant numbers of students who identify in these categories. Through the process of data collection using surveys and interviews as described below, the context of this study was subsequently narrowed to focus on French teachers working in communities with a significant number of native or heritage Spanish language speakers, with face-to-face classes of at least 10 students.

### *Data Collection*

This study employed a non-experimental qualitative grounded theory research method with an inductive approach and emphasis on specific people and/or situations (Maxwell, 2013) in order to collect and interpret rich data embedded in instructional contexts. Given the limited research on the pedagogical strategies used by instructors when teaching an L3 to students who are native or Heritage speakers of Spanish, this provided for investigation and analysis of the training for this unique pedagogical context that these educators reported as part of their teacher preparation programs in an attempt to add to the understanding of how this preparation may affect their instructional strategies. Following Maxwell (2013) and Glaser and Strauss (1967), the study did not seek to obtain representative opinions on preparation for L3 instruction to generalize to a larger population, but rather used systematic comparative analysis of data to connect research and theory and to develop a rich, thorough understanding of teacher perspectives, exploring how pedagogical strategies are used within this group.

To address the specific focus of this study—French language teacher strategy training for instruction of French to Spanish-speaking students—data was gathered on secondary French teachers across the state. Data reports from the Georgia Department of Education for the academic year 2016-2017, obtained by online request, detailed the names of 440 French teachers. As the next step, the websites of all high schools listed in the report were researched and e-mails were obtained for 266 participants. The researcher contacted all 266 participants by e-mail, inviting them to participate in the study; of those, 119 high school teachers agreed to participate and signed a consent form prior to completing the survey. One hundred of those 119 participants completed the survey, and from those, the researcher selected ten interview participants.

### *Instruments and Measures*

For this phase of the study, two different measures were used to investigate the perspectives of teachers as related to their pre-service training: the Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire (see Appendix A) and open-ended interviews



(see Appendix B). The Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire was used to gather responses from all high school French teachers who participated in the study. After gathering data with this instrument, open-ended interviews were conducted with selected teachers to further explore the participants' perspectives.

### *Follow-Up Interviews*

Using theory-based sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), interview participants were identified based on an initial understanding of the general context through the Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire and, as the study progressed, an iterative sampling process led the researcher to focus on the participants with experience teaching French as an L3 to students who are native or Heritage speakers of Spanish. Based on the response rate and the reported number of Spanish-speaking students in French classes, the researcher contacted selected educators with an invitation for follow-up interviews to explore how their teacher education programs and in-service training prepared them for this classroom experience, including strategies that they currently use.

Exploratory interview questions were prepared based on reviews of related research as well as responses from the initial survey. However, in accordance with grounded theory and the sequential nature of the design, these questions served as possible discussion topics given that each participant could introduce new ideas for exploration, therefore proposing new pathways of inquiry to be explored. The participants were asked to reflect on their own language learning experiences and strategy training instruction received in college or as a part of their professional development. These partially-structured interviews allowed for an evolving process that enabled the researcher and the participants to pursue themes that arose during the conversations.

### *Data Analysis*

Initial information regarding teacher backgrounds and training related to teaching bilingual students was gathered through the Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire. Data from this survey were analyzed for relationships between years of teaching and professional development and training for instructing students learning French as an L3.

This first round supported the subsequent analysis of data collected through follow-up interviews, researcher notes on the interviews, and the coding process. Using the constant comparative method, interview data was coded at three levels: open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The interview transcripts were read multiple times, and first codes were created to help lower the data volume to manageable chunks. These open codes were used to find major themes among the larger data set. The process of reviewing the transcripts and notes then led to an inductive approach to identify and revise more specific codes such that they could be merged into categories, themes, and subthemes. Later, the codes, categories, and themes were examined for relationships, and this process of axial coding gave a wider perspective to view conceptual connections between themes and categories. Finally, selective coding was used to ascertain themes present in all data elements to identify emerging theories regarding how French teachers reported training or professional development for strategy instruction and use for teaching French as an L3 to bilingual and Heritage speakers of Spanish.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The study employed three different measures to explore teacher perspectives in order to gather data from different points. By using the Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire, follow-up interviews, and peer debriefing, the researcher was able to triangulate the data between each source, using the responses from the questionnaire to identify points of discussion for interview participants as well as possible codes in analysis.

*Open-Ended Interviews.* By their nature, open-ended interviews can present bias on the part of both the researcher and the participants. In order to avoid reporter bias, the researcher structured each interview in an open-ended manner such that the surveys could provide initial talking points, but the participants were open to share their ideas related to the subject matter in an unrestricted manner. Participants were invited to add to their perspectives without intentional direction or influential questions from the researcher. For example, participants were read the following question from the questionnaire, “Did you receive any training on strategy instruction and language learning strategy use for teaching bilingual students?” They were then invited to discuss their perspectives on this general idea and to explore their personal viewpoints on the subject further. In order to avoid researcher bias, the researcher kept a journal throughout the interview, coding, and analysis process in an effort to identify possible personal biases and address them during each step. Additionally, peer debriefing was used to compare the interpretive results and ensure inter-rater reliability.

Findings

Survey Results

A Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire was created for this study specifically to learn about pre- and in-service educators’ preparation to teach bilingual language learners (see Appendix A). Two items from the survey specifically targeted teacher training and professional development related to L3 instruction. The first question asked participants about the type of training that they received on instructing bilingual students. The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Participants’ Training and Professional Development Related to Teaching Bilingual Students

Type of training received	Survey n=100	Interview n=10
Teacher preparation	37.0 %	40.0%
Professional development	43.0%	60.0%

A comparison of the types of training reveals that interview participants (N=10) reported having greater amounts of preparation and training for working with L3 learners than survey participants at large (N=100). Of note, most of the training occurred while they were in-service teachers and not during their teacher preparation programs.

Participants were also queried on the number of professional development hours that they received addressing techniques for instructing bilingual and Heritage speakers. Although the breakdown of hours demonstrates a variety of professional development hours, almost half of the participants claimed that no professional development—including conferences, seminars, workshops, and/or faculty meetings—was received. A summary of the professional development hours received by the study participants is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Participants' Professional Development Related to Teaching Bilingual Students in Hours*

Hours of professional development receive in the past two years	Survey n=100	Interview n=10
0	57.0 %	40.0%
1–9	27.0%	50.0%
10–19	8.0%	10.0%
20+	8.0%	0.0%

*Qualitative Results*

Data from the open-ended interviews were analyzed qualitatively and the results revealed three major themes: (1) English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) training, (2) the absence of preparation for L3 instruction, and (3) teachers' perception of the need for focused training on L3 instruction. The frequency counts of these themes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

*Frequency count of the major themes from open-ended interviews*

Codes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totals
ESOL training	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	13
Absence of L3 preparation	1	1	3	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	12
Need for focused L3 training	3	16	2	2	3	0	2	4	1	2	35
Totals	7	18	6	2	4	1	3	6	9	4	60

One theme that emerged from many of the interviews was that participants received some training on strategies for teaching ESOL as a part of their pre-service training and/or as in-service teachers. For example, Participant 9 stated, "After teaching for several years, I got ESOL certification. Though the ESOL coursework was not specifically for Spanish-speaking students." Similarly, Participant 10, a French teacher and a department chair, echoed this by stating, "We don't have an ESOL program at our school, that I'm the ESL contact, so I manage all of the ESOL population that we have, since we don't have a program. All we have for them is accommodations and strategies to help them out, so I manage all of that." These and other

similar comments demonstrate that strategy training and preparation for ESOL were perceived as being relevant to the discussion. However, it is important to note that participants were referring to helping secondary students acquire English as an L2 and not French as an L3. As an illustration, Participant 1 shared, “I do have the ESOL certificate, but that doesn’t really deal with learning a third language. It’s an instruction for Spanish speakers, mostly what we deal with in Georgia with ESOL students, helping them in their English classes, but there is no support for a third language in the mix.” Furthermore, Participant 10 noted that bilingual Spanish-speakers in her French classes were not English language learners. She stated, “They’re all perfectly fluent in English, none of them are ESOL students, so they all either never qualified or have tested out a long time ago.” These participants demonstrate the relevancy of discussing ESOL certification or training when considering the topic of L3 instruction (see Table 4), even though the participants concluded that the Spanish-speaking students “. . . are perfectly fluent in English” and “no third language support” was necessary for them. In addition, when asked about professional development opportunities, the participants once again introduced the topic of ESOL training into the discussion. At first, Participant 1 mentioned “no professional development in regard to L3 instruction.” However, this participant later remembered having “a couple of things with ESOL and our inclusion students, but that doesn’t pertain to me as much.” These comments demonstrate that the participants felt it necessary to discuss training and professional development in ESOL even as they noted little relevance to L3 teaching.

Participants of the present research study shared that their Spanish-speaking students were “perfectly fluent in English” and did not require any of the ESOL accommodations and services. Thus, even if ESOL training was received by the pre-service teachers, it did not satisfy the need for L3 teaching strategies because general ESOL strategies do not meet the needs of bilingual Spanish-speaking students, and such training received by pre- or in-service teachers may not have been sufficient for instructing bilingual L3 learners. This suggests that French language teachers may be in need of different types of training to help their bilingual or Heritage Spanish-speaking students successfully learn French as an L3, both during pre-service training and in their professional development.

Another theme that was present in multiple interviews was the prevalence of L1 and L2 instructional methods and techniques and the absence of training on how to teach an L3 to bilingual students. Participant 1 asserted, “I do have the ESOL certificate, but that doesn’t really deal with learning a third language. Similarly, Participant 3 stated that in both her undergraduate and graduate degrees, there was “nothing specific about an L3, it was always considered a second language, so never a third.” These comments demonstrate the theme of the absence of specific training and preparation that arose in the majority of interviews (see Table 4). Of all of the interview participants, only Participant 4 confirmed that he received instruction on strategies for teaching bilingual students an L3 using Oxford’s (1990) Strategy System. Therefore, with the exception of Participant 4, all the participants interviewed claimed that they received no pre-service training on how to teach French to students who already know two languages, one of which is Latin-based. When Participant 1 cautiously stated, “I don’t know if I am equipped to help such a student,” she

expressed a concern common among other participants in the study; namely, the concern of “not being prepared” and “not knowing what to do for bilingual students.” Or, as Participant 5 phrased it, “I don’t have as much of the capacity or maybe just knowledge of how to do more for those students.” Overall, with the exception of Participant 4, the interviews revealed a recognition that there was an absence of training and development for teaching an L3 to bilingual and Heritage speakers of Spanish, with some acknowledging that this may prevent them from being prepared to fully support these students.

The final theme, teachers’ perception of the need for focused training on L3 instruction, was evident among several participants’ discussions. Specifically, participants suggested that there is a need for focused training on strategies and researched-based practices for teaching French to speakers of multiple languages. For example, Participant 1 stated, “Most of the strategies I give them because I’ve made that connection myself in learning their language.” Participant 2 asserted that she did not receive specific training for working with this unique population of learners; therefore, she and her colleagues are “inventing as we go.” The theme of a need for preparation and training was confirmed by Participant 3, who stated, “I think for new teachers who are coming into the field, they’re probably not being prepared the way they should be being prepared for working with Hispanics and for foreign language teachers specifically, there probably should be some kind of training ideas, series, something given to them to say how to work with students who already have two languages in their brain,” a sentiment that was echoed by many of the interview participants. Just as Participant 5 felt an absence of “capacity or maybe just knowledge of how to do more for these students,” Participant 2 went even further, suggesting “. . . that teachers who are going through teacher education programs must have a minor in Spanish, whether they be language teachers or not.” Thus, the participants did not feel adequately prepared for teaching bilingual Hispanic students and they recognized the need for L3 strategy training only after becoming in-service teachers and facing a real-world classroom. Furthermore, all of the participants expressed a desire to help their Spanish-speaking students more. One of the teachers interviewed for this study, Participant 2, even suggested creating a series of professional development workshops to educate current WL teachers on how to help bilingual Spanish-speaking students learn an L3.

## **Discussion**

WL teachers, facing the challenges and realities of modern classrooms, must possess a broad array of skills and instructional strategies and they must be able to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners. As WL classrooms become increasingly multicultural, training on how to work with specific populations of learners, such as bilingual students, is urgently needed. Teachers are required to design and implement standards-based lesson plans that are tailored to the needs of diverse student populations. Language educators must also collect, analyze, and utilize data on student achievement and progress while maintaining a safe environment that is conducive to learning. Furthermore, in order to be effective practitioners, teachers must also have a profound knowledge of students’ needs, interests, and challenges in addition to an awareness of and respect for students’ home languages and cultures.

Given the changing nature of the student population in WL classrooms in Georgia, where the present research study was conducted, educators must be prepared to support students with diverse home languages and cultures. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers are equipped with sufficient training and support to meet the needs of every student. Although very little is known about how teacher training programs equip pre-service teachers with the strategies for teaching an L3 to bilingual students, the present study attempted to investigate this topic. In summary, three major themes, evident in the open-ended interviews, emerged from this study: (1) ESOL training, (2) the absence of preparation and training for instructing an L3, and (3) teachers' perception of the need for focused L3 training. While ESOL training is an essential part of every teacher preparation program, it is not highly applicable to teaching French as an L3 to bilingual or Heritage speakers of Spanish. Moreover, French language teachers need different types of training to help their diverse students because general ESOL strategies do not meet the needs of bilingual Spanish speakers who learn French as an L3.

The second theme that emerged from the participant interviews—the absence of training on how to instruct an L3 to bilinguals—is extremely alarming, taking into consideration the current literature on multilingualism, which confirms the advantages of L3 acquisition when students utilize their prior linguistic knowledge to optimize their new language learning (Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Jessner, 1999; Thomas, 1988). As prior research suggests, WL teachers can help their bilingual and multilingual learners by training students how to use the L1 and L2 language learning experiences to their advantage (Meissner, 2004), using techniques such as activating students' metalinguistic awareness (De Angelis, 2011; Jessner, 1999; Thomas, 1988) and strengthening students' cross-linguistic knowledge (Cenoz, 2000). The absence of training on the abovementioned strategies raises a concern regarding how well current WL educators in Georgia are prepared to teach diverse learners who are not monolingual English speakers learning French as an L2. Of all the teachers interviewed, only one participant reported having received strategy training for instructing L3 learners using Oxford's (1990) strategy system. The findings of the present study indicate that more pre- and in-service training opportunities are needed to help teachers better support this unique population of learners.

Finally, the interview participants expressed a need for specific tools and strategies tailored towards instructing bilingual language learners. The third major theme to emerge from the interview data—teachers' perception of the need for focused L3 training—reinforces the need for more professional development opportunities for language educators. Even though most participants reported that training on L3 instruction was not part of their pre-service training, several participants shared the desire to find effective strategies that work for Spanish speakers on their own such as making connections between two Latin-based languages and creating their own lists of language similarities and differences between the L1 or L2 and the L3. Despite the lack of training and professional development available on strategy instruction and language learning strategy use for teaching bilingual language learners, the secondary French teachers who participated in this study expressed the need for such training, especially training that includes research-based practices.

In general, the participants in this study acknowledged the need for aligning teacher preparation programs with the fast-changing student demographics in Georgia public schools. Even though the training that teachers received was not sufficient to meet the needs of language learners with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the study participants sought to find strategies that would work for bilingual students on their own through trial and error. The participants clearly communicated their lack of preparation to support linguistically diverse students as well as their desire to better serve these students in the future.

### **Limitations**

This study had several limitations that are common among qualitative studies; namely, participant availability, respondent subjectivity, and researcher influences. Moreover, the various proficiency levels of students who speak Spanish as a Heritage language were not taken into account and these students were grouped with bilingual Spanish speakers in the present study. Given that the Georgia Department of Education does not collect information on Heritage Spanish speakers' proficiency levels in Spanish, it was impossible to distinguish Heritage from bilingual Spanish-speaking students in the present study. It is possible that learners' proficiency levels in Spanish may affect how well they acquire a Latin-based L3.

#### *Participant Availability*

The initial sample of 266 high school French language teachers in Georgia was compiled from the data report roster obtained from the Georgia Department of Education. Of that theory-based sample, 119 high school teachers volunteered to participate, and 100 participants completed the questionnaire in full. Furthermore, only 10 interview participants were chosen among the first survey responders, based on their teaching experience with Spanish-speaking students and their willingness to participate in the follow-up interviews. Thus, the present findings cannot be generalizable to the entire population of French teachers of Spanish-speaking students learning an L3 in the U.S. because there was no random selection of participants from high schools across the country.

#### *Reporter Bias*

This study involved semi-structured interviews that allowed each participant to share unique personal and professional experiences. These varied experiences were evident in the recoded data; however, the level of subjectivity inherent in qualitative research included participants' diverse educational backgrounds both inside and outside of the U.S., non-traditional teacher certification programs, and professional development experiences in different school districts. Additionally, the validity of this research study depends on the participants' honesty, ability to respond accurately to each question, and individual interpretations of the survey and interview questions.

#### *Researcher Bias*

As Maxwell (2013) warned, researchers may feel tempted to select data that fits their preexisting theory and goals. In order to avoid this validity threat, the Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire was used to avoid researcher bias and to



allow the participants to respond to open-ended questions. Though personal and professional experiences were part of the interest in the topic of the study, the researcher tried to evaluate how personal values and expectations affected the conclusions of the study. Furthermore, the researcher approached the data without a preconceived theory in mind.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Future studies could examine this issue at a national level, as the present study only focused on teacher preparation and training for L3 instruction within the context of Georgia. Future studies may also focus on teacher preparation programs to uncover which elements of the curriculum support L3 instruction. In addition, future studies could employ quantitative or mixed method designs. It will be important to examine the instruction and training that educators receive to help them support linguistically diverse students in their classrooms from multiple lenses, which will help uncover how best to instruct an L3 to bilingual and Heritage speakers of Spanish. As the U.S. becomes increasingly diverse and multicultural, there is an urgent need for more studies of this kind.

### **Conclusion**

This study found that there is a lack of professional preparation and training related to teaching Spanish-speaking students an L3. It also uncovered the urgent need for professional development to help teachers meet the fast changing and increasingly diverse student demographics in the state. Given the results of this study, WL secondary teachers may benefit from training and professional development on how to teach bilingual Spanish-speaking students by activating their prior knowledge and building on two language systems (English and Spanish) instead of just one (only English). The results of the present study indicate that such training and preparation was either not received or was insufficient during their teacher preparation coursework. Furthermore, participants also reported inadequate or insufficient professional development opportunities as in-service teachers that specifically address how to help Spanish-speaking students succeed academically. The results of this study suggest that strategy training for instructing bilingual and Heritage Spanish speakers an L3 should be included in teacher preparation programs and should also be the focus of professional development workshops for in-service teachers.



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## Appendix A

### Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire

This survey is confidential. Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Anna Surin at [asurin@valdosta.edu](mailto:asurin@valdosta.edu). This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (229) 259-5045 or [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

*Please choose the best answer to the following questions:*

Sex:      Male   Female                      Prefer not to answer

Age:      a. 21-30   b. 31-40   c. 41-50   d. 51+

Race/Ethnicity: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, Prefer not to answer

Are you Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin? yes/no

What World Language(s) do you currently teach?

- Spanish
- French
- German
- Italian
- Portuguese
- Latin
- Other(s): please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Circle one option that best describes your educational level.

- Non-degreed
- Associate
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Specialist
- Doctorate

In which areas do you hold a teaching certificate? (Please circle all that apply)

- French language
- Elementary Education
- Special Education
- ESL
- Other(s): please specify \_\_\_\_\_

What is your first language?

What language(s) do you speak at home?

List all the languages you know \_\_\_\_\_

How many years of French language teaching experience do you have?

How many years of overall teaching experience do you have?

Do you currently have Spanish-speaking students in your class?

If you answered "yes", how many Spanish-speaking students are enrolled in your French course this year?

- less than 5%
- 6-20%
- 21-50%
- more than 50%

Did you receive any training on strategy instruction and language learning strategy use for teaching bilingual students? yes/no

Please indicate the number of hours you have spent in professional development (conferences, seminars, workshops and/or faculty meetings), in the past five years, that addressed teaching heritage, bilingual, or Spanish speakers.

- 0
- 1-9
- 10-19
- 20+

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions**

How did you become a World Language teacher?

Please describe your language learning experiences.

What led you to choose this profession?

What is your favorite aspect about teaching French?

Do you currently have Spanish-speaking students in your class? What are your experiences teaching Spanish-speaking students a third language?

Did you receive any training on strategy instruction and language learning strategy use for teaching Spanish-speaking students during your teacher preparation coursework?

What strategies do you use with Spanish-speaking students?



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