Second Language Teaching and Learning: the Roles of Teachers, Students, and the Classroom Environment

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SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: THE ROLES OF TEACHERS, STUDENTS, AND THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

by

Martin Briggs

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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2014
ABSTRACT

Second Language Teaching and Learning:
The Roles of Teachers, Students, and the Classroom Environment

by

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Utah State University, 2014

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This portfolio is a compilation of the concepts and practices that the author believes constitute effective second language teaching. It is centered on the author’s teaching philosophy, which is based on the teacher’s roles as facilitator and the students’ roles as active participants in a student-centered, communicative classroom. The author claims that as teachers and students understand and carry out their respective roles, student proficiency in the target language will increase.

In support of this teaching philosophy, three artifacts are included that discuss the following: 1) The use of television commercials and other media from the target culture to facilitate language teaching, 2) an evaluation of the language services offered to Hispanic English language learners in Cache County, Utah, and 3) the speech act of declining an invitation in the United States. These artifacts and teaching philosophy are extended through a concluding annotated bibliography, which discusses authentic texts, second language teaching methodology, and speech act refusals.

(142 pages)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to all the people who have helped me throughout the process of writing this portfolio. First, I thank my committee members, Dr. Karin de Jonge-Kannan—my first connection in the Master of Second Language Teaching program at Utah State University, and who spent countless hours revising my portfolio drafts—and Dr. Maria Luisa Spicer-Escalante—who helped me improve my abilities and understanding of Spanish linguistics and through whose connections, assistance, and inspiration I was hired as a Spanish/English Dual Language Immersion teacher.

Secondly, I thank my major professor, Dr. Joshua Thoms, who introduced me to the world of technology use in the second language classroom. He has also sacrificed hours of his time to give me priceless feedback and revisions of my portfolio, as well as shared his expertise in academic writing.

I would also like to thank my classmates and colleagues for their input and advice in both teaching and research, and for their friendship and support throughout the portfolio process. Lastly, I thank my wife, Megan, who first inspired me to pursue a master’s degree and then supported me from start to finish.
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INTRODUCTION

This portfolio is a compilation of the concepts and ideals that I have adopted while studying in the Master of Second Language Teaching (MSLT) program at Utah State University. It centers around my personal teaching philosophy, which has evolved over the past three semesters as I attended classes, read books and articles, and attempted to apply the concepts I learned in my own Spanish and English as a second language (ESL) classes that I teach.

My teaching philosophy is based on three pillars, namely, the role of the teacher, the role of the student, and the ideal classroom environment for language learning. The teacher fulfills his/her role as a facilitator in language instruction by providing students with the tools necessary to communicate. Meanwhile, the students fulfill their role by using the input they are given as they interact with others in the target language. By promoting positive, respectful interaction between students and with the teacher, the result is a low-anxiety classroom environment that fosters language learning. This learning environment can be enhanced by incorporating content into the curriculum that is “produced by members of a language and culture group for members of the same language and culture group” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 85), via a number of technological tools and applications.

Also included in this portfolio are three artifacts that reflect some of the concepts highlighted in my teaching philosophy and demonstrate my work as a student and a teacher. The first artifact focuses on teaching the Spanish language, particularly through the use of electronic media that native Spanish speakers use for entertainment.
The second artifact is a proposed study design with the goal to improve the literacy of local Hispanic English language learners (ELLs) in Cache Valley. It includes a review of the research for assessing community language services such as ESL programs and translation availability in critical community organizations such as hospitals and police departments.

My third artifact focuses on teaching culture in a foreign language (FL) classroom, particularly the speech act of declining an invitation. While declining an invitation may seem simple for a native speaker, research shows that it is a delicate process to decline someone’s invitation without causing awkwardness in the conversation or crossing perceived social boundaries.

Following the three artifacts is an annotated bibliography of some of the works I have studied that have been most influential to me. It is divided into three sections, each with a particular focus. The first section covers some of the most influential works on second language teaching, while the second section is devoted to teaching the particular cultural concept of refusals. The third section highlights work that centers on the use of multimedia-based materials in the second language classroom.

Overall, the journey of studying, writing, teaching, reflecting, and rewriting throughout my time in the MSLT program has been a rewarding experience, and has helped open my eyes to the endless amounts of accessible information for improving my abilities to teach languages. I have also learned that my teaching philosophy will (and should) evolve throughout my career as I continue to teach, study, and learn.
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
Apprenticeship of Observation

My experience in education is a little different from most people. Being homeschooled by my mother until 4th grade was unique, but (perhaps more thanks to her than to myself) by the time I entered public school, I was one of the top students in the class. My mother is an amazing example of how to provide differentiated instruction, as she taught four or five children, all in different grade levels, at the same time. She played an important role in my being prepared for public school when I was enrolled in 4th grade.

Public school helped me grow academically even more, and I think it was during junior high and high school that I grew the most. Several of my teachers had to practice their behavior management with me on a regular basis. Many of those teachers helped me develop a love of math, accounting, learning, and teaching. I was inspired to become a teacher thanks to Mr. Ward, a new math teacher who was completing his student teaching at the time. I loved how he was ‘cool’ and seemed to be more like us students than most of the other teachers, and I enjoyed being in his class. I felt like someday I could be that ‘cool teacher’ and help change kids’ lives.

It was in high school that I took my first Spanish class. Like most students, I was taught in a grammar-based classroom, in which we responded to less-than-meaningful questions posed by our textbooks or by our teacher and practiced communication activities such as asking for classmates’ names, phone numbers, etc. Though the instruction in those Spanish classes was grammar-based, I enjoyed class and learned to talk about my likes and dislikes and to give and request information well enough to barely survive in a Spanish-speaking community. What I didn’t realize, however, was
that the teaching methods used in those classes would have a considerable impact on the beginning of my teaching career several years later.

This type of instruction, which is a type of foreign language teaching methodology that is common in most parts of the US today, and is usually characterized by grammar drills, repetition, and few opportunities for students to communicate with others in a meaningful way, continued to be the norm throughout my formal Spanish education. Though I did participate in a two-month intensive Spanish course followed by 2 years of Spanish immersion in Argentina, the rest of my formal schooling in Spanish was heavily grammar-based. I continued to enjoy the classes and my proficiency continued to grow, but when my semester of student teaching came, I encountered a difficult mental hurdle regarding my language teaching approach.

For my student teaching, I was sent to a high school in which I would be teaching Spanish and ESL. The district language teaching methods in that area followed the Total Physical Response (TPR) (Asher, 1969) and TPR Storytelling (Ray & Seely, 1998) approaches, both of which were at the opposite end of the language teaching method spectrum from the methodology through which I had been taught. I struggled a great deal to try to adapt my teaching style to the way that most of the teachers around me were teaching, since most of them taught with no grammar instruction at all, while I had recently been educated through nearly 100% grammar instruction.

I was very grateful when my student teaching experience ended, for though I had learned substantially, I found it nearly impossible at the time to adapt my teaching preconceptions to the methods used by my colleagues where I had done my student
teaching. Nonetheless, I would later adapt some of these methods in my profession as an elementary teacher in Spanish/English Dual Language Immersion (DLI).

After student teaching, as I taught an entry-level, college Spanish class at Utah State University (USU), I began ascribing to a more middle-of-the-road approach to teaching a foreign language. Then, instead of pounding out conjugation drills and dissecting the meaning and production of –ar, –er, and –ir verbs with my students, we focused on communicating and completing specific tasks in Spanish. The grammar that we learned was to facilitate communication, rather than the ultimate goal of instruction. I have good reason to believe my students agree that their learning environment represented a more balanced approach of teaching content alongside grammatical accuracy (see, for example, Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, & Mendell, 2001). I attribute this success mostly to the teaching method that I have become familiar with while at Utah State University—a communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology, as described by Lee and VanPatten (2003), which I will address in greater detail later.

Today, as a DLI teacher in Spanish and English, I am working to adapt the CLT methodology in a second-grade classroom. I have also found some of tenets of TPR methodology to be useful in helping maintain student motivation and increase their vocabulary. In my classroom, grammar is not forced on students, nor is it completely ignored. Rather, it is only taught when and to the depth it should be. I am still working on adapting to the CLT method. However, as I near the end of my experience in the MSLT program and begin my teaching career in DLI, I hope to be able to make use of any type of teaching method I am expected to follow and adapt it to fit my students’ needs.
Professional Environment

This portfolio is focused on my future professional environment. When I graduate from USU, I plan to continue teaching in DLI in public education. I also plan to teach ESL and possibly Spanish, in adult education and university settings, both in the United States (US) and abroad.

My students differ in their socioeconomic backgrounds, as a result of the diverse background of students in the Park City, Utah, where I currently teach. While many of the native English-speaking students typically come from middle- and upper-class families, approximately half of my students come from middle- to lower-class families. Students also vary in their literacy level, both in English and in Spanish.

Another group of students that I plan to continue teaching in the future is adult ESL students, both in university and community settings. This means that my relationship with my students (and, when applicable, their parents) will vary considerably, including the topics of interest that we discuss in class and the technological resources available to my students outside of the classroom.

Since the majority of this portfolio was completed prior to my being hired as a DLI teacher, it is mostly geared toward teaching ESL to adults and adolescents in international settings. However, the principles and concepts I discuss can also be applied to teaching the Spanish language, both in the US and abroad, and to children, adolescents, and adults. I discuss the application of these principles and concepts further in my teaching philosophy statement and in my language, literacy, and culture artifacts.
Personal Teaching Philosophy

During the past three semesters in the MSLT program at Utah State University (USU), my idea of what constitutes an effective language teacher has been transformed in many ways. Though it will continue to evolve throughout my teaching career, in this section of my portfolio I highlight what I believe to be some of the most important traits of effective foreign language instruction. To do so, I reference various scholars who have conducted research on the given subjects, as well as contribute examples from my own teaching.

I begin by expanding on the role of the foreign language teacher, including the importance of input that students can understand and process in their minds; the role of grammar instruction; and other tenets of the CLT methodology. I then expand on the role of the students in acquiring a second language, including the importance of interaction in the target language, by which I mean using the language in a meaningful way to accomplish a set of tasks and communicative goals. Third, I describe the ideal classroom environment for language learning, including the importance of a low anxiety level that comes through a positive relationship between the teacher and students. Lastly, I explain some of the benefits of using authentic texts and technology to enhance motivation and language acquisition.

The role of the teacher

First, regarding the role of the teacher in a second language classroom, I believe that a teacher who is the center of attention at all times—leading each activity, calling on students one-by-one to respond, and talking for nearly the whole class time (whether in the students’ native language or the target language)—will feel burdened and
overwhelmed. Lee and VanPatten (2003) call this type of role, in which the teacher is “the authority, the expert, the central figure in the classroom who transmits knowledge to the students” the Atlas complex (p. 6). Early in my teaching career, in a high school Spanish language classroom, I experienced the Atlas complex, and I believe my students did not reach their full potential because I did not give them enough opportunities to use the language in a meaningful way.

Now, as an instructor in university Spanish and intensive ESL courses, I try to assume the role of an architect (Lee & VanPatten, 2003) in my teaching. Just as an architect leads a group of builders to construct a building, I believe a teacher should lead his/her students toward a communicative goal by giving them the tools (Vygotsky, 1978) (e.g., a certain grammar principle or a cultural norm for apologizing in the target culture) to complete meaningful, real-life activities. This process allows students to learn and grow in their language proficiency as they use the tools to communicate (rather than recite) in the target language.

The way in which a teacher can provide his/her students with tools is through input, which can come in many forms, including writing, video, pictures, verbal communication, and so on. As Lee and VanPatten (2003) explain, input, like petroleum, can come in various forms and levels of quality. Often, the higher the quality of the refined petroleum (such as high-octane gasoline), the better a vehicle will run. In the same way, Krashen (1982, 1985) teaches that not just any input leads to language acquisition, but rather, input at a slightly more advanced level than what the students can currently understand, or comprehensible input.
To make my input comprehensible for my students, I follow Long’s (1983, 1996) counsel by slowing down and simplifying my speech, using gestures and other visual aids, and by linking ideas to students’ background knowledge (see also Hatch, 1983). I agree with Lee and VanPatten (2003), who claim that “features of language … can only make their way into the learner’s mental representation of the language system if they have been linked to some kind of real-world meaning” (p. 27). I also believe it is important to use the target language as much as possible in the classroom, even for beginner-level students (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). In fact, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2012), suggests that the target language be used at least 90% of class time, by both teacher and students. In my own classroom, I try to limit teacher-talk time to less than 50% of the class, leaving the rest of the time for students to use the language as they communicate with each other to complete task-based activities.

Task-based activities (TBA) (e.g., Ballman et al., 2001; Ellis, 2003) play a key role in CLT methodology. One important characteristic of TBA is their focus on a communicative goal (Ballman et al., 2001) rather than simply mastering a specific grammar skill. To further explain TBA, I use Lee’s (2000) definition of ‘task’:

(1) a classroom activity or exercise that has (a) an objective attainable only by the interaction among participants, (b) a mechanism for structuring and sequencing interaction, and (c) a focus on meaning exchange; and (2) a language learning endeavor that requires learners to comprehend, manipulate, and/or produce the target language as they perform some set of workplans (p. 32).
One might notice Lee’s use of the words ‘interaction’, ‘participants’, ‘learners’, and ‘perform’, implying that TBA are learner-centered rather than teacher-centered (e.g., Ballman, 1998). Relating back to the architect metaphor I used earlier, though the architect (i.e., the teacher) directs the work, it is the group of builders (i.e., students) who complete the construction of the building. As students focus on the task at hand (rather than the ‘correct’ way to use a hammer), they become much more effective, and not only accomplish the task but improve their construction (language) skills and abilities.

An example of a TBA for a first-year, college-level Spanish language class could involve students having to find an apartment to rent in South America. To accomplish this task, students must (a) come up with their own criteria for their desired apartment, (b) search through rental advertisements (either printed or electronic) for an apartment that fits their needs, and (c) then communicate (both in written and oral conversation) with the landlord (e.g., the teacher, a guest native speaker, or fellow students) to lease their new home. While grammar is not the central focus of this activity, it is still taught, but only the amount needed to complete the task. In this case, the teacher could explain apartment vocabulary such as bedroom, kitchen, furnished, and utilities, and how to conjugate verbs such as rent, pay, look, and move in the first and second person singular forms. The teacher would not need to teach all of the various verb forms and conjugations at this time. This same activity can also be adapted for ESL and EFL students.

As demonstrated in the aforementioned example of TBA, I believe grammar instruction should be focused on communication rather than on form (Ballman et al., 2001; Lee & VanPatten, 2003). In other words, I believe effective language teachers focus on helping students communicate with native speakers of the target language rather
than on saying and writing everything with no grammatical errors. Traditionally, there are two types of second language teaching methods that are located on opposite ends of the spectrum for teaching grammar (Ballman et al., 2001). On one end, there is the “grammar for grammar’s sake” type, and on the other end the “no grammar instruction” type (Ballman et al., 2001, p. 32). The CLT method, many aspects of which I incorporate in my teaching philosophy, fits in the middle of the grammar spectrum in second language teaching. I call this approach the ‘happy medium’ because it focuses not on the question of whether grammar should be taught, but rather on the amount that should be taught, the time at which it should be taught, and the method that should be used to do so (VanPatten, 1988). Rather than teaching grammar explicitly through drills and memorization—‘in a vacuum,’ so to speak—the CLT approach uses TBA as in the example above in which students are taught only the grammar necessary to successfully complete a real-world, meaningful task.

As I mention in my apprenticeship of observation, before beginning the MSLT program at USU, I had taught second languages using other methods located on both ends of the spectrum of grammar instruction. But now, having taught first-year, college-level Spanish language courses and an intensive English conversation course at USU, I have seen the results of teaching with the CLT method. Students have become more confident in their oral and written communication, and their overall communicative competence (e.g., Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995)—which entails cultural, linguistic, and other abilities essential for communication—has increased. Each class period, I try to provide several opportunities for students to communicate with each other in meaningful ways as they work together to accomplish the culminating TBA by the end
of the period. These activities are not focused on practicing and refining a given grammar concept, but rather on communicating and negotiating meaning (Long, 1996) to accomplish the task. I find that as my students work together to accomplish these tasks, they can communicate with each other and get their point across, even though they naturally make grammatical mistakes. While the aforementioned paragraphs describe what I believe to be the role of the language teacher, in the following section I describe the responsibilities of language learners.

**Role of the student**

While the task of providing input is a responsibility of the teacher, I also believe that language learners have certain responsibilities as well, if they are to acquire the language. One responsibility learners have is to attend to the input they receive. As input “gets processed in [learners’] working memory” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 31), it becomes intake. This intake, in turn, eventually becomes part of learners’ interlanguage via occasions when learners are pushed to produce output (Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Swain, 2005).

Output plays an integral role in second language acquisition (SLA), for the same reason an athlete improves his/her abilities through practice and exercise, and a builder improves his/her professional abilities through using the tools of the trade. Reverting back to the architect metaphor, I believe that my students (i.e., the builders) can improve very little by only receiving input. To improve their proficiency, they must use the language (i.e., a symbolic tool) to interact with others in a meaningful way (Long, 1983; Magnan, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 1998), using the grammar to support communication rather than hinder it.
Another comparison with the architect metaphor is the concept of gradual improvement. Just as a newly hired employee needs guidance and sometimes makes mistakes as s/he learns the right skills, language learners also make mistakes and require coaching and guidance as they work to develop their language proficiency. While today my students might need some assistance to accomplish the communicative tasks set before them, in the future they will be able to accomplish the task without assistance. Vygotsky (1978) refers to this process as regulation.

According to Vygotsky, there are three stages within regulation, namely, object-regulation, other-regulation, and self-regulation. Since object-regulation is a stage through which only young children pass—and my students are teens and adults—for the purposes of this teaching philosophy I describe only the latter two. When going through the other-regulation stage, learners rely on ‘others’ who are more competent than them, such as the teacher or a more proficient peer. Then, as the student learns and develops his/her proficiency, s/he transitions into the self-regulation stage, or the stage at which s/he no longer needs assistance to complete the task. Vygostky further describes the gap between other-regulation and self-regulation as the zone of proximal development (ZPD), at one end of which is a person’s actual level of development (i.e., his/her ability to perform a given task with no assistance) and at the other end of which is s/he cannot perform the task, even with assistance.

Vygotsky (1978) suggests that “[a] child’s mental development can be determined only by clarifying its two levels: the actual development level and the zone of proximal development” (p. 87), and I believe this concept applies to people of all ages. I have had students come to me after scoring poorly on a chapter test, and then, as we review and I
offer a little assistance, are able to score much higher. In other words, some of the things my students can do today only with assistance, they will be able to do in the future independently. Now that I have explained my philosophy regarding the teacher’s and learners’ respective roles in the second language classroom, I will discuss the ideal classroom environment for SLA, one in which the teacher and the students interact in a relaxed, respectful, positive atmosphere.

Classroom environment

To explain the impact that the classroom environment has on learners’ SLA, I refer once more to the architect metaphor. There is always a reason for which the builders are motivated to work hard every day. If the builders lack motivation, progress on the building slows or stops altogether. I believe the same principle of motivation applies in the second language classroom.

Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) provide a list of ten ‘commandments’ for motivating students, three of which I believe greatly impact students’ ability to acquire the language. The first commandment is to “set a personal example with your own behaviour” (p. 215). I highly agree, since I have seen my students’ excitement toward learning the language increase as I show enthusiasm toward teaching it. The second of Dörnyei and Csizér’s (1998) commandments is to “create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom” (p. 215). Krashen (1982, 1985) also emphasizes that language is acquired as students feel a low level of anxiety. The third commandment from Dörnyei and Csizér’s (1998) list that I believe is important is to “develop a good relationship with the learners” (p. 216). By following these three guidelines, students’ motivation and willingness to communicate (WTC) (MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998) increases.
WTC, or “the probability of speaking when free to do so” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 564), is closely tied to student motivation. Since motivation is “believed to be both constructed and reconstructed in the course of second language interaction, with significant consequences for the rate of learning and the ultimate level of success” (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 256), I strive to give my students as many opportunities as possible to interact in a meaningful way, such as debating a current event, conducting a survey, or performing a role-play. This can come through paired, group, or whole-class activities, while avoiding those activities that single students out through calling on someone to give an answer. As I provide students with opportunities to use the skills and concepts we learn in a low-stress, friendly environment, I believe my students grow and excel in their abilities to communicate effectively in the second language.

Another way to improve students’ WTC is by giving proper feedback. Ballman et al. (2001) state that “student-initiated” grammar instruction, or “teachable moments,” are “likely to make a lasting impression because [they fill] a student’s self-identified need” (pp. 50–51). Feedback can also be focused on the teacher. Hattie (2009) writes:

When teachers seek, or at least are open to, feedback from students as to what students know, what they understand, where they make errors, when they have misconceptions, when they are not engaged, then teaching and learning can be synchronized and powerful. Feedback to teachers helps make learning visible (p. 14).

In accordance with Hattie, I believe it is important for teachers to seek feedback from students to know what type of activities will maximize their students’ WTC. I once asked students at the end of the semester which learning activities they felt had been most
effective. Their responses both amazed and surprised me, since their favorite activities were ones that I had shied away from repeating too much, so as to avoid boredom. Though I have since used the activities more often, the class could have been more beneficial for my students had I sought feedback on a more regular basis regarding the effectiveness of certain learning activities. In the following section, I discuss two concepts that have proven helpful for me in to maintain student interest and thus avoid boredom and monotony in the second language classroom.

*Technology and Authentic Texts*

One of the main ways I encourage meaningful interaction is through the use of authentic texts—media that is made by native or fluent speakers for native or fluent speakers of the same language (Rings, 1986). According to Blake (2008), “the Internet is an ideal tool for allowing students to gain access to authentic L2 materials; it might be the next best alternative to actually going abroad” (p. 4). Since authentic texts were made for a communicative purpose in the target-language community rather than to teach grammar, they can be a great resource for helping students acquire the language.

One example of authentic texts that I am exploring is the use of commercials as part of my lessons, which also exposes students to the target culture (Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006). Martínez-Gibson (1998) recommends that the teacher “[select] several commercials” which “will give [students] enough variation to find common aspects of a country and identify these as unique to a culture” (p. 130). Using commercials also provides authentic topics on which students can write. Martínez-Gibson (1998) continues: “[Using several commercials] gives [students] the opportunity for creative and critical thinking in their writing assignments” (p. 130). In addition, authentic texts are
useful for increasing student motivation, an integral part of WTC. For example, Otte (2006) writes: “Students’ motivation to gain more exposure to [the L2] increased as a result of the use of aural authentic texts in the classroom” (p. 133). While experimenting with authentic texts, I have observed that my students’ motivation to gain more exposure to the language is increased through the use of commercials and other authentic texts in the foreign language classroom, both in Spanish and in ESL classes.

Authentic texts can be used in many ways, including as a means of teaching grammar. Through using authentic texts (e.g., The Three Little Pigs in an ESL class), “reflecting on form is raised as a topic of conversation … rather than as a mini-lesson during communicative tasks and activities. … [Through] dialog with the teacher and each other, learners develop grammatical concepts through problem-solving activity” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, pp. 216–217). Perhaps one of the most important reasons to use authentic texts in the classroom is to expose students to the various cultures of native speakers of the target language. This reason is especially pertinent to teachers who are non-native speakers of the target language, as well as teachers who teach in an area where students have fewer opportunities to interact with native speakers of the target language on a regular basis. Thus, authentic texts can serve as an effective means for teaching the culture that forms an integral part of every language.

While authentic texts can come in the form of print or electronic sources (audio or video), computer-mediated communication can also serve a powerful role in second language teaching. Blake (2008) explains that e-mail and chats offer students “the highest level of interactivity because they permit one-on-one, personal exchanges” (p. 10). I have utilized computer-mediated communication in my foreign language class, assigning my
students to communicate with key pals (i.e., pen pals, by e-mail communication) from other countries who speak the target language. It has been interesting and rewarding to see the types of exchanges that occur between the students and their native-speaker key pals. One reason it has been rewarding is the higher motivation with which my students have approached their writing assignments, since their audience consists of real people who actually speak the L2 as a native language, rather than a teacher (or worse, a computer program) whose feedback often tends to be limited to the grammatical mistakes the students make. One more reason is that it potentially requires less work on the teacher’s part to provide feedback, as the exchanges between students and native speakers can occur on a wiki or blog, which the teacher need only check periodically.

Dialogue journals, whether in pen-and-paper form, in e-mail, or in a blog or wiki, can serve as yet another teaching and learning tool in foreign language education, particularly by helping to lower student anxiety toward writing in the L2 (Foroutan & Noordin, 2012). The process for developing and keeping a dialogue journal is simple. As the name entails, these journals involve a dialogue between two people—the student and a more proficient peer (i.e., the teacher or a student from a more advanced class). Since the dialogue journal does not include any explicit corrective feedback, it provides a context in which students can feel less intimidated and more motivated, since they can discuss a virtually endless variety of topics. These topics can be chosen by the teacher and included in a prompt, if desired. I have used dialogue journals in Spanish, EFL, and ESL classrooms, and the results tend to be the same. Not only do I as the teacher get a more representative sample of each student’s writing proficiency in the target language, but I also get to know my students better as they tell me about their favorite hobbies, their
families, and so forth. With a clearer understanding of my students’ linguistic abilities as well as their interests, I become better equipped to provide individualized instruction for each of my students. I have found the practice of using dialogue journals to be a meaningful, effective part of second language teaching.

Conclusion

In summary, my teaching philosophy is based on the roles of both teacher and students, the importance of a classroom environment that is conducive to language learning, and the role of authentic materials and technology to facilitate language acquisition. As a DLI teacher, my role is to give my students tools for acquiring the target language, such as comprehensible input in the target language and only the amount of grammar and vocabulary instruction needed to accomplish specific TBA. This is especially important for young learners like my second-grade students, many of which are at a beginner level of proficiency.

I must also help my students understand that their role is to use the target language as much as possible to communicate, since language acquisition is severely limited when there is no output. In the Utah DLI program, students and teacher alike are expected to use only the target language within the target language classroom. By doing so, students have rapidly improved their Spanish proficiency, and many are able to communicate very well in the content area—which, in the current Utah DLI curriculum for second grade, includes mathematics, literacy in the target language, and other content areas such as social studies and science (Utah Dual Language Immersion, 2014)—even though some have only been in the DLI program for a few months.

In my DLI classroom and elsewhere throughout my teaching career, my classroom must have a respectful, relaxed atmosphere in which students are willing to
communicate in the target language and not be fearful of committing errors. By providing my students with an example, through my own behavior, of enthusiasm to study the target language, I can help my students build their proficiency in Spanish and ESL.

Lastly, I can increase the effectiveness of my instruction and the communicative activities I include by engaging my students with authentic media and using technology inside and outside of the classroom to connect my students with the target language and culture. The language, literacy, and culture artifacts that follow this philosophy reflect not only some of the work I have done as a student in the MSLT program but, more importantly, help illustrate my teaching philosophy in action.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TEACHING OBSERVATIONS
As I have been developing and exploring my personal teaching philosophy over the past three semesters, it has been my pleasure to observe several colleagues teach a foreign language. In this section, I will discuss four of them. At the time of the observations, three of these colleagues were graduate instructors (GIs) in the MSLT program, and the other was a visiting Fulbright scholar. The bright scholar and one of the GIs were each a native speaker (NS) of their target language (Arabic and English, respectively), while the other two GIs were nonnative speakers (NNSs) of the target language (Spanish). To simplify my discussion of the teaching I observed, I will hereafter refer to each of the four colleagues as instructors.

Regarding the classes I observed, all of them were college-level foreign language classes. The Arabic instructor taught two Arabic classes—a first-semester course and a second-semester course—the ESL instructor taught an intermediate-level ESL conversation class, and the two Spanish instructors each taught a first-semester Spanish class. Through these observations, I have been able to compare the teaching methods of others with my personal teaching philosophy.

As mentioned in the previous section, I believe both teacher and students have certain respective roles in the fostering of an effective, student-centered environment for language learning. The teacher, through comprehensible input in the target language (TL)—in the form of verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as authentic texts—provides students with enough explicit instruction to be able to accomplish the TBA at hand. Meanwhile, the students’ role is to use the tools the teacher gives them, to communicate and interact with others. By fulfilling their respective roles, teacher and students can create a positive, respectful classroom atmosphere in which students are
willing to take risks and commit occasional errors in the TL. These things put together create an environment that is conducive to language learning. Below I will expound on the examples I observed that do or do not match my philosophy.

The role of the teacher

First, I will discuss the role of the teacher in the various classes I observed. One of my colleagues, a first-year Spanish instructor, employed a variety of student-centered, task-based activities in his lesson. For example, in an activity in which the communicative goal was to book a hotel in a Spanish-speaking country, each student was assigned one of two roles—either a hotel receptionist or a traveler. Naturally, the goal of the travelers was to reserve a room for a given number of days with a limited amount of money, while the receptionists’ goal was to convince as many travelers as possible to stay in their hotel. By preparing specific roles for each student ahead of time, the teacher could then assume a background role and act as a participant and an observer in the activity, rather than being the center of attention. Furthermore, the instructor had provided students beforehand with only the amount of explicit grammar instruction necessary to carry out their respective roles in the activity. Not only was the activity student-centered, but it also had a communicative goal that required students to interact with each other and negotiate meaning (Savignon, 1983, 1997) as they worked to complete the TBA. Each of these aspects represents what I believe to be the correct role of a FL teacher, and are basic tenets of the CLT method for language teaching.

Another tenet of CLT and the student-centered classroom that I noted was the greater amount of student talk than teacher talk during the second half of the class. Furthermore, when the teacher did speak, it was 100% in the target language (TL). This
practice of using the TL at all times is something that I still seek to improve in my own classroom. Using only the TL greatly contributes to the students’ success in the classroom, since the more comprehensible input they receive and process as intake (Lee & VanPatten, 2003), the greater their acquisition of the language will be (Krashen, 1982).

While there was more student talk than teacher talk during the second half of class, I was initially disappointed in their lack of participation, since several were conversing with each other in their native language instead of participating in class. However, when the teacher introduced the hotel reservation activity, most students became more motivated and willing to communicate with each other in the target language as they worked to complete the TBA. This contrast in student behavior provides an example of the importance of fostering within the students a desire to actively participate in class, and I believe the teacher could have done so through less teacher talk at the beginning of class.

_A classroom environment conducive to language learning_

Another instructor I observed, also teaching a college-level, first-semester Spanish class, incorporated activities into his lesson plan that encouraged student-talk throughout the whole class period. By providing his students with several opportunities to interact in the target language in a low-anxiety environment (Krashen, 1982), the students’ WTC (MacIntyre, 2007) increased. This type of learning environment is what I emphasize in my teaching philosophy, and it can be developed through the use of multimedia-based authentic texts (Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006; Tschirner, 2001), a variety of learning activities in order to fit a variety of students’ interests and abilities.
(Gardner, 2006), and student-centered (rather than teacher-dominated) interaction (Ballman et al., 2001; Lee & VanPatten, 2003).

The role of the student

The student-centered classroom environment I observed in the second Spanish class, as well as in an intensive ESL class for international university students, exemplifies another principle of my teaching philosophy, namely, the responsibility of students in acquiring the TL. I agree with Swain (1985), that it is not only by receiving comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) that one acquires a new language, but also by producing output, through interaction with others in the target language (Long, 1983, 1996). Furthermore, the interaction that occurs should focus on form rather than on grammar (Ballman et al., 2001). Each of these requirements was met as the teachers in both these classes included a variety of activities that required students to discuss meaningful, interesting topics. For example, in the ESL class, students shared their opinions of Halloween (a US holiday that had been celebrated the day before) in a brief survey, comparing and contrasting the holiday with possibly similar holidays in their respective cultures.

Authentic texts and technology

Another aspect of my teaching philosophy that I observed in my colleague’s ESL class was the use of authentic texts (i.e., media made by native or fluent speakers of the target language for native or fluent speakers of the target language) as part of instruction and learning activities. After my colleague elicited students’ reactions to Halloween, she provided students with a handout of Halloween statistics and interesting facts, such as the percentage of Americans who dress up for Halloween. This authentic text had been
created for the entertainment of native English speakers, but the instructor easily
incorporated it into her lesson as a means of encouraging discussion while also teaching
unique cultural aspects of life in the US.

While most of the aforementioned instructors incorporated some form of an
authentic text in their learning activities, it was the ESL instructor and an Arabic
instructor in a college-level, second-semester Arabic course who used technology to
enhance instruction and learning activities in their classrooms. For example, the Arabic
instructor not only used the typical PowerPoint presentation, but also made use of a
document camera, as well as the touch screen of a computer to better illustrate for
students how to write certain words in Arabic.

This practice of using technology as a means to deliver and facilitate instruction
in a FL class not only increases student motivation, but also has the potential to teach
cultural aspects through digital video and other multimedia-based materials (Chen &
Oller, 2005; Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006; Tschirner, 2001) that were less accessible prior
to the expansion of internet accessibility. Sadly, I did not see any such examples of
technology-delivered authentic texts in my classroom observations.

In summary, much of the teaching I observed during my time in the MSLT has
reflected aspects of my teaching philosophy. Most of the teachers exhibited what I
believe to be the correct roles of effective FL teachers while fostering a student-centered
classroom environment in which students interact through task-based activities. However,
there was an apparent lack of multimedia-based authentic texts in their lessons. By
incorporating these into their classes, I believe they can more effectively help their
students develop cultural understanding and improve communicative competence.
ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION OF TEACHING VIDEO
My video recording is from a university-level, first-semester Spanish language class that I taught at Utah State University in April, 2013. The class took place on a Friday at 8:30 a.m., which is important to note early on given that many students appeared to be tired from a week of school and did not appear to be completely awake during the class. The communicative goal for this particular lesson was that students would be able to tell about their favorite vacation (e.g., when it was, what they did, why this particular vacation was their favorite.

As I view the recording, I notice a few practices that match my teaching philosophy, and others that should be avoided or changed to better conform to my beliefs of what fosters second language acquisition (SLA). My teaching philosophy is centered on three primary components: 1) the role(s) of the teacher, 2) the role(s) of the students, and 3) a classroom environment that is conducive to SLA. In addition, I also recognize the importance of using authentic texts, particularly those that are technology-based, to enhance communication and motivation to study the TL. It is against these principles that I evaluate my teaching.

First, concerning the classroom environment, I believe the lower anxiety level of my assignments and activities helped to increase students’ confidence (Krashen, 1982) and their willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, 2007) in the TL, which is particularly important in an early morning class. I established good rapport with my students, as evidenced by the students’ willingness to ask me questions when they did not understand. The student desk arrangement was also conducive to learning. With 4 rows of students, I organized students into two pairs of rows, which has proven successful for me by facilitating fast and easy partner changes, in a type of ‘speed dating’ pattern whenever
students rotate. This arrangement also took the focus away from me as a teacher, making the class atmosphere more student-centered (encouraged in the CLT method) rather than teacher-centered (more representative of the Audiolingual Method [ALM]) (Ballman et al., 2001). Another advantage of this desk arrangement is that it made it easier for me to notice when there was an odd number of students, and I could simply sit down across from a partnerless student so we could complete the pair work together.

Though the classroom arrangement was conducive to SLA, I notice that I made a mistake during paired activities. Several activities were meant to be divided into two parts (e.g., one student interviews his/her partner, then they switch roles), and I filled in for a student who was absent. However, I stood up and left my partner by him/herself for the second half of the activity, as I walked around the room to observe students and offer help. Since a good foreign language classroom environment requires the teacher to provide as many opportunities to communicate in the TL to the students while still making him/herself available to all students to offer feedback, I could have avoided the problem by explicitly planning beforehand for alternative grouping in case there was an odd number of students.

Next, I notice that several of my actions in the classroom resemble tenets of the CLT method. First, as mentioned above, the group and paired activities were student-centered and focused on communication rather than grammar. For example, to introduce hobbies, sports, and activities, I devised a quick guessing game for pairs, in which one student would describe his/her favorite sport or hobby (where s/he engages in the activity, what equipment is required, etc. and his/her partner would try to guess what it was. This resulted in high student engagement and communication.
Another characteristic of CLT that I notice in my lesson was the use of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), including slower, simplified speech, repetition, and gestures to help students understand. In my short instruction periods on grammar, I taught only what I believed to be the grammar necessary to complete the next communicative activity, which is also characteristic of CLT. Through visual aids such as a PowerPoint presentation with easy-to-understand, color-coded grammar explanations and examples, most students were able to then apply the concept in the activities that followed. Most of the activities were TBA (Ballman et al., 2001; Ellis, 2003), in which students had a communicative goal, such as asking someone questions to guess his/her favorite sport or hobby, or interviewing a person about his/her worst date ever.

Though the activities were communicative, I notice a problem that detracts from SLA, and that is the use of one’s native language in the classroom. The CLT method advocates 100% use of the TL by both teacher and students (Ballman et al., 2001), but many of my students, including my most proficient student, used English when they did not completely understand the activity. I could have overcome this problem by setting a better example for my students by never using a word of English, and by emphasizing the many other resources students have to communicate, such as gestures and other non-verbal communication. Though instruction might take longer to make sure all students understand, I could spend less time talking about personal anecdotes to give students as much time as possible to use the TL in a meaningful way (Ellis, 2003).

Lastly, regarding my use of authentic texts (e.g., Crossley et al., 2007), I believe my lesson followed my teaching philosophy, at least to some degree. For example, in the lesson I introduced the preterit tense in Spanish through a story that is internationally well
known. I had previously found a version of the children’s story *The Three Little Pigs* in Spanish, and asked students to work in pairs to review a section of the story and write some of the words that seemed new or peculiar to them (in this case, the ones that had an accent mark, indicating the possibility of a word in the preterit tense). This process in which students worked with the input fits the concept of noticing (Schmidt, 2001), in which the input is “manipulated in particular ways to push learners to become dependent on form and structure to get meaning” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 142). Students received the activity well, as they were familiar with the context. If I could do the activity again, another possible authentic text could be from an online news source such as *Univisión* or *CNN en español*, while still finding an article with which students are familiar, such as a current event in politics.

In summary, though there were several aspects of my teaching in the video recording that matched what I claim to be my teaching philosophy, I also notice some areas in which I can improve. The classroom environment was conducive to SLA, and there were several traits of the CLT method to language teaching, as well as an example of authentic texts in my instruction. This observation of my own teaching has helped me better understand the common phrase ‘Easier said than done’. To articulate a teaching philosophy is important, but applying the teaching philosophy is a process that takes time and attention to detail. I hope that throughout my teaching career, I will regularly record and observe my teaching and evaluate my application of my teaching philosophy, which will help me be more purposeful in my teaching methods and activities.
LANGUAGE ARTIFACT

Using authentic texts to enhance communication in the Spanish classroom
Introduction and Reflection

This paper was written for Dr. Maria Luisa Spicer-Escalante in the Spanish 6200 course, *Spanish Linguistics*. I originally wrote this paper with my classmate Kyle Hatch, but since then I have incorporated some changes as I prepared it for my portfolio. Since my teaching philosophy emphasizes maintaining a high student motivation toward acquiring the target language, and using authentic texts and technology, I chose to include this paper as the language artifact in my portfolio. Its focus on using authentic texts and technology in the FL classroom to enhance instruction of both linguistic and cultural aspects, as well as increase students’ motivation and WTC (MacIntyre, 2007), make this artifact an important pillar in my portfolio.

Regarding this artifact’s applicability to my current and future profession, we originally wrote this paper as we taught beginning Spanish students in a university setting. However, I am currently gaining a different perspective as I teach in Spanish/English DLI. One major difference that I have noticed between university students and elementary students is their attention span, particularly with respect to their self-motivation. While many university students are self-motivated in their dedication to the course—usually hoping to increase their ability to communicate in their future career—many elementary students have a much lower dedication, and thus have a relatively short attention span. Nonetheless, the virtually limitless variety of technology-delivered authentic texts makes can be adapted to maintain students interest regardless of their interests and maturity-levels.

Another difference between university and elementary students is the content discussed in class. While the content of a university entry-level Spanish class is typically
focused purely on the Spanish language and its associated cultural aspects, the content of a Spanish DLI class is based more heavily on other school subjects, such as mathematics, science, or social studies. This difference is also minor when one considers the amount of technology-delivered authentic texts that can be used for educational purposes in any content area.

That being stated, while the concepts and practices discussed in this paper are important and applicable to any FL classroom, it is of particular importance to teaching the Spanish language because of its increased use throughout the world. Spanish is currently the third most widely spoken language in the world, with more than 53 million people of Hispanic origin (17% of the total population) in the US alone in 2012, ranking the US as the country with the second-largest Hispanic population in the world (United States Census Bureau, 2013a). Naturally, many people in the US are studying Spanish. However, with this increase in teaching Spanish as an FL, it can be difficult for teachers to create a classroom environment where students have opportunities to interact with the language in authentic settings.

During the initial process of writing this artifact, I was able to apply some of the concepts mentioned in this paper, particularly the use of commercials and other authentic texts as part of class instruction in a college-level, first-semester Spanish class. By doing so, I noticed an increase in students’ interest in Spanish and its associated cultural and linguistic aspects. Other findings indicate that the use of various forms of authentic text, including multimedia such as commercials and short video clips (e.g., Hispanic soap operas) is an effective way to bring the Spanish language and its various cultures into the
classroom. I believe that these methods will increase student motivation, WTC, cultural awareness, and linguistic understanding of the Spanish language.
Background

As mentioned in the introduction, Spanish is currently the third most widely spoken language in the world, by over 495 million native and nonnative speakers (Fernández & Vitores, 2012) in at least 47 different countries (Ethnologue, 2013) across four1 continents (Hualde, Olarrea, Escobar, & Travis, 2010). As the world’s economy becomes increasingly globalized, it is not only beneficial but also necessary for students to become proficient in Spanish. Furthermore, with the rapid improvements in technology and communication, learners of Spanish as a second language, particularly in the US, can be exposed to many varieties of Spanish that differ both linguistically and culturally.

While it is difficult to introduce students to all the different varieties of Spanish, there are numerous linguistic, cultural, and other advantages to using authentic texts—as mentioned earlier, materials produced by a culture group of native and/or fluent Spanish speakers for native and/or fluent Spanish speakers of the same culture—in their various written and digital forms to teach Spanish as an FL. The advantages of authentic texts include improved cultural competence, linguistic proficiency, and motivation to acquire the Spanish language.

Authentic versus Adapted Texts for Second Language Teaching

Before explaining the use of authentic texts in the Spanish classroom, it is important to address an issue concerning what is considered the proper use of authentic texts to teach foreign languages. While some claim that the authentic material must be used in its original form, without any alterations or simplifications, others believe that texts must be simplified or elaborated to a degree to increase student comprehension and

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1 According to Hualde, Olarrea, Escobar, and Travis (2010), these four continents include the Americas (including North and South America), Africa, Europe, and Asia. Thus, many people consider them to be five continents.
retention of the texts and concepts (O’Donnell, 2009). Crossley, Louwerse, McCarthy, and McNamara (2007) point out that each type provides certain linguistic, cultural, and motivational advantages in the second language classroom. For the purpose of this artifact, I refer to authentic texts (in this case, multimedia-based materials) as their original, unaltered form. The only exceptions to this rule are explicitly stated.

The Use of Technology and Authentic Texts

In the past, there have been many disadvantages to using authentic texts such as video and music clips in the second language (L2) classroom such as: lack of selection, low accessibility of authentic multimedia, and the amount of time needed to prepare the material (Tschirner, 2001). With current technological innovations and increased access to this technology in the classroom, the use of short multimedia segments can now be a highly effective teaching tool, easily accessible to both students and teachers. There are several linguistic, cultural, and affective advantages of using authentic texts in the classroom, as multimedia can be used in many innovative ways to increase student motivation and help them acquire a better understanding of the target language and culture (see, for example, Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

In this artifact, I refer to multimedia as any type of authentic text that is delivered through technology, such as TV commercials and web-based applications like Google Earth. These types of multimedia can also be used as a bridge to introduce students to other forms of literature in the L2 (Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006). For example, Etienne and Vanbaelen (2006) employ a three-step approach to analyzing a commercial in the French language, after which they apply the approach to analyzing a French poem. Another example is to show a news video of a current event in a Spanish-speaking
country, then assign student pairs to read a short newspaper article on the web about the same event. This advantage of using technology-delivered authentic texts to introduce students to other forms of literature, along with their ability “to present the audio, visual and cultural aspects of communication” (Skirble, 1977, p. 518), should drive teachers to find effective ways to use these tools in the classroom.

*Linguistic Advantages*

As most people’s goal in taking a Spanish class is to ultimately be able to communicate with native Spanish speakers (Ballman et al., 2001), it is important to first discuss the linguistic advantages of using authentic texts as part of Spanish lessons. While the standard variety of Spanish (Hualde et al., 2010) (i.e., a variety with more general and less colloquial vocabulary) is most commonly taught in the US, one must also remember that there are other distinct varieties spoken around the world. These varieties are formed as a result of one’s geographic location, socioeconomic status, education, religion, and countless other aspects, and can be divided into two categories—Spain and Hispanic America—within each of which there are several varieties. For example, in Spain, there is the *castellano* (Castillian) variety, as well as the Andalucian, Canarian, and Sefardi varieties. In Hispanic America, typical varieties include the Caribbean, Mexican/Central American (including the southwestern US), Andinan, Southern Cone, Paraguayan, *porteño* (of Uruguay and Buenos Aires, Argentina), and Chilean varieties (Hualde et al., 2010). Each of these varieties across Spain and Hispanic America exhibit different linguistic features that distinguish its speakers from those of other varieties.
For example, the Castillian variety of central and northern Spain, with its distinction between the /z/ and /ce/ phonemes (i.e., the units of sound that distinguish one word from another word) and the regular /s/ phoneme, is distinguished from the other Spanish varieties in the world largely because they employ ceceo, in which the /z/, /ce/, and /s/ all have the same phoneme. Another example is the porteño variety of Argentina and Uruguay, with its nonvoiced (i.e., the vocal cords do not vibrate) /y/ and /ll/ sounds, which distinguishes it from many other varieties in which the /y/ and /ll/ are voiced (i.e., the vocal cords do vibrate) (Hualde et. al., 2010).

Through the use of authentic texts such as commercials, Spanish teachers can display an accurate, authentic example of the various Spanish varieties throughout the world. Many worldwide companies have produced slightly different commercials for the same product, varying the words, phrases, and accents, depending on the region in which the commercial is shown. Thus, teachers can use two very similar commercials that are rich in linguistic differences to compare different accents or idiomatic expressions, among other illustrations. Since authentic texts such as commercials offer students diverse opportunities to observe people using the language in a realistic way, these settings provide a context to which students can relate and which teachers can use to give meaning to the language (Martinez-Gibson, 1998; Skirble, 1977; Tschirner, 2001).

Another linguistic advantage of using multimedia-based authentic texts is that teachers are able to choose and adapt them to fit a variety of lesson plans and objectives. Given that multimedia dialogue is natural and unforced, teachers can focus student attention on a particular linguistic feature of the language (e.g., a speech act or grammar principle) so that students can see examples and correct modeling performed in a realistic
scenario. These examples can be phonological, grammatical, lexical, morphological, syntactic, and more (Chen, 2005; Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006; Tschirner, 2001). For example, if a teacher wanted to introduce Spanish morphology (i.e., word formation), s/he could use a commercial that utilizes vocabulary that is familiar to the students, but has been changed morphologically to become a different grammatical form, (i.e., descanso to descansar, or gota to gotear). S/He could then discuss with students how the words were used in the commercials and apply it to how the students could use them.

Teachers have often used pictures and other visual aides to assist in the learning process, but multimedia-based materials provide additional benefits as well. For example, Tschirner (2001) writes: “Video has the added advantage of providing models and examples on how to deal with the subject [being taught] linguistically” (p. 310). Video can provide visual and aural examples of many kinds of linguistic subjects a teacher may be teaching. If s/he wanted to focus students’ attention on a particular grammar principle, s/he could find a commercial in which the grammar is used in authentic communication. If the pedagogical focus is on emotional states, s/he can search for short video clips in which various emotions are easily apparent. In fact, not only can these materials be used as supplemental lesson material, they should also be the focal point of the lesson (Magnan, 2008).

It is well known in SLA that students can acquire a language more easily when they are exposed to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982). Authentic texts that are technology-delivered, such as commercials, can be valuable sources of comprehensible input, since they provide numerous non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and background music. These cues promote comprehension of the material and lead to
vocabulary acquisition. Since “linguistic knowledge can only be used in authentic communicative situations if it has been acquired in such situations” (Tschirner, 2001, p. 309), multimedia-based materials can have a profound effect on students’ acquisition of the Spanish language and its associated cultures.

Cultural Advantages

While it may be true that Spanish “is a linguistically homogenous language” (Moreno-Fernández & Otero, 2008), the many different Spanish varieties are spread throughout the world, each with its own cultural differences. Since language and culture are inseparable (Agar, 1994), I believe it is essential for Spanish students to receive not only linguistic instruction but explicit cultural instruction, as well. Martinez-Gibson (1998) even argues that “language is communication, but not without an understanding of its culture” (p. 115). As previously mentioned, there are many Spanish varieties throughout the world, each coupled with unique cultural aspects. For example, there are multiple ways to greet someone in Spanish (e.g., Hola, buenos días, ¿qué tal?, etc.) depending on the context, location, and interlocutor. Without knowledge of the cultural and pragmatic differences in Spanish, such as proper levels of politeness, a Spanish language learner could leave a first impression of being impolite when initially meeting a native Spanish speaker. For aide in teaching cultural concepts, one can include multimedia-based materials in the lesson.

For many students learning Spanish, their first significant exposure to the language occurs in the Spanish class. Many of them also come with various (accurate and inaccurate) stereotypes of the culture of Spanish speakers, such as the idea that all Spanish speakers like tacos and wear sombreros. Thus, “the foreign language classroom
is where students begin to acquire some awareness of people who not only speak differently but also act, react, and live differently. This cultural knowledge leads to a [greater] acceptance of the world’s variation” (Martinez-Gibson, 1998, p. 115). By teaching culture in the L2 classroom, teachers encourage students to notice these cultural differences, as well as give them more self-confidence as they monitor their speech in Spanish. Also, due to the visual component of digital authentic texts, there is an increase in motivation (Chen & Oller, 2005; Vassilikopoulou, Retalis, Nezi, & Boloudakis, 2011) and subtle, unplanned learning that happens when students are presented target culture through multimedia. It follows that students gain a better cultural awareness from multimedia than from interactions with printed text (Martinez-Gibson, 1998).

Teaching Spanish through technology-delivered materials exposes students to the target culture while also giving context and other visual cues, which help students avoid feeling overwhelmed by all of the new grammar and vocabulary. The visual component of learning allows students to actively focus on the language while more passively becoming aware of certain customs or actions in common scenarios (Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006). Students are quick to notice cultural differences and are often interested in why people interact in a way that is foreign to the students.

Cultural awareness assists learners in better understanding cultural actions and reactions. Human actions such as gesture, body movements, expressions, and other appropriate social functions are more quickly observed and understood through multimedia-based materials, such as TV commercials (Chen, 2005; Skirble, 1977; Tschirner, 2001), since teachers are able to pause the video to address students’ questions or concerns regarding linguistic or cultural issues, such as pragmatics or idioms. This is
because “cultural knowledge, in a broad sense is indispensable for pragmatic competence since interpretations, schemata and scripts are often grounded in a particular culture” (Tschirner, 2001, p. 312). These pragmatic and idiomatic issues are often better noticed and understood with the visual component that multimedia provides.

To teach culture effectively, a teacher needs enough authentic texts to not only maintain student interest but also to provide them with enough evidence to select the common threads and identify them as being unique to a culture (Martinez-Gibson, 1998). Thus, by amassing a collection of video, music, and other multimedia-based materials, teachers can be prepared with the selection of materials that would be most effective for a class or individual student. Though compiling this collection was once one of the difficulties in utilizing technology-delivered materials in the classroom, today’s digital multimedia is much more easily stored and retrieved. It is also much more easily presented today, as teachers can project images or video clips from YouTube and other sources onto a screen for the class to see.

Multimedia-based materials can communicate cultural values, because much like authentic literature, TV commercials and similar multimedia are a cultural artifact (Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006). These materials are very adept at portraying, transmitting, emphasizing, and promoting cultural values, since they often use these as methods of selling products (Brennen, 1988; Lo, 1993). Thus, teachers who would like to focus on a specific aspect of Hispanic culture can find commercials that emphasize a specific value as clearly or subtly as they believe would be in the best interests of the students. Cultural values can fall into the categories of ‘big C culture’ or ‘little c culture.’ LoCastro (2012) defines the differences between these terms as follows:
Culture with a small $c$ refers to aspects of everyday life, such as the food served at holiday time and the elaborate ceremonies for coming of age in Hispanic and Jewish communities. Culture with a big $C$ includes art, music, literature, and architecture, among other forms” (p. 41).

As mentioned in my teaching philosophy, commercials and other multimedia-based materials can be effective tools for helping students distinguish between the culture typically displayed on television and the everyday-life type of culture that plays an integral role in the lives of native speakers of Spanish (Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006).

**Motivational Advantages**

In his affective filter hypothesis, Krashen (1982) mentions three factors that contribute to student success: motivation; self-confidence; and anxiety. When teaching a foreign language such as Spanish, maintaining these three factors can be difficult because when students do not understand what is being said, it can negatively affect their motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Multimedia-based projects could be used in the classroom to positively influence these three factors because the purpose of most multimedia-delivered materials is to engage the viewer. Multimedia can also be tailored to provide humor or any other emotional setting that a teacher believes will increase student participation and/or comfort level.

Because today’s students are familiar with technology, seeing them in Spanish and thus being able to utilize the visual cues from the multimedia can lower their anxiety. Etienne and Vanbaelen (2006) state: “Equipping students with decoding tools and letting students use them with texts that they will find engaging and nonthreatening is a priority. TV commercials fit this profile” (p. 88). Not only TV commercials but also clips from
soap operas or movies can be engaging and comprehensible to students, since many of them display a neutral form of Spanish (i.e., one not aligned with a specific region and does not carry that region’s jargon). This neutral form focuses on using Spanish that avoids the differences in varieties and focuses on using a form of the language that is similar and more easily understood across the cultural, linguistic and regional variances in the Spanish language.

Before using video clips in the lesson, teachers should preview the media and make sure they provide enough clues to help students understand the linguistic and cultural aspects being studied. Since multimedia is dynamic and “not only [displays] affect, (i.e., emotions, feelings, and reactions) more vividly than written texts can but, as a result, can also help to motivate and engage language learners effectively as well as cognitively” (Chen & Oller, 2005, p. 264). Much of this motivation is brought about by the use of technology such as the Internet, which is becoming increasingly accessible to students throughout the world (Stevens, 2006).

By utilizing the Internet, an inexhaustible resource for multimedia-based materials, teachers can positively influence motivation since commercials, soap operas, movies, and other authentic texts are “primarily made and marketed as entertainment, [and thus] the address to the audience is primarily oriented around the production of pleasure” (Bignell, 2002, p. 128). The material presented is specifically created to engage, interest and appeal to the viewer, in many cases specifically the youth (Skirble, 1977). As students focus on the particular commercial, the language will seem less intimidating, even though students are likely receiving far more than they can understand or would feel comfortable with if it were presented via other methods.
As teachers use authentic texts, they should look for items that would be of interest to the students in their class, such as the activities in the background, the dress of the people, cultural customs, among other characteristics. Although material presented in the L2 may initially seem daunting, students will use the visual, aural, and other clues to make sense of the material. “High-frequency language can often be found in material laced with humour, surprise, and pathos; entertainment value, especially unexpected surprises, can dramatically enhance memorability” (Chen & Oller, 2005, p. 267). When we search for new, modern modes of technology-based authentic texts to share with the students, “we are demonstrating an interest in their esthetic [sic] preferences, instead of devaluing or rejecting them” (Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006, p. 95). As students recognize the effort that teachers put into making their learning experience enjoyable, meaningful, and rewarding, students’ motivation will increase.

Ideally, when students are learning a language, they are immersed in an environment of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) where they are also given opportunities to communicate and thus create output. Tschirner (2001) argues that “learners need to be part of a community of speakers and they have to be able to plunge into and participate in the world of native speakers. The digital classroom [i.e., one that uses the internet and other authentic texts] meets these requirements in a learner friendly way and it marks an important step towards making language acquisition possible in the classroom” (p. 305). By using authentic texts, teachers can provide students with more meaningful, realistic opportunities to use the language, thereby helping learners ‘plunge’ into the native speakers’ world.
Multimedia-delivered materials create many opportunities for students to interact with the language and culture. Through their audiovisual components, students are bombarded with “visual clues that facilitate interpretation so that students do not have to rely only on their knowledge of the foreign language to understand” (Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006, p. 89). In this way, commercials facilitate interaction with a member of the target language and culture by offering context, which allows students to subconsciously analyze mannerisms and other cultural nuances while also focusing on the form and meaning of the language being studied. These benefits and others make technology-delivered authentic texts valuable tools in the Spanish classroom. Below follows a discussion on how to implement their use in instruction and other class activities.

**Effectively Using Authentic Texts in the Spanish Classroom**

Authentic texts lend themselves to a number of useful, not necessarily linguistically focused, activities in the second language classroom, since they provide an opportunity for students to discuss an artifact that becomes the focus, while the language becomes a secondary focus. Martínez-Gibson (1998) found that the use of multimedia-based materials was most beneficial in teaching students about the target culture, when it was combined with pre- and post-viewing activities. For example, teachers can allow students to discuss the target culture and the cultural differences that students are aware of or have heard of before viewing the commercial or other authentic text. As a post-viewing activity, teachers can encourage students to describe how their ideas have changed through viewing the material, emphasizing differences students were not aware of, or correcting any misconceptions. Although these are culturally focused activities,
they can be performed in the target language, thereby meshing culture and language learning.

Authentic texts should be used to stimulate communication in the L2 classroom. Research has shown that students’ basic goals in a language classroom are to gain the ability to communicate (Ballman et al., 2001; Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006). To reach these goals, teachers must plan activities that address these goals directly and facilitate communication. Teachers should then develop activities that provide learners with opportunities to discover and reproduce the language, while using the multimedia-delivered materials as tools to provide context and background information (Chen, 2005).

To engage students in the discovery phase, teachers can first choose authentic texts in which the content, storyline, subject matter and entertainment value match students’ interests, age level, and life experiences (Chen, 2005). Following these suggestions will engage students and can lead to unplanned discussions on topics that interest the students, which can result in valuable learning experiences for them. Video clips can be chosen to provide students opportunities to see the language used in a realistic, cultural context, which allows students to observe the language in an ‘authentic’ setting in which they are acquiring the same language abilities used by speakers of the target culture (Tschirner, 2001).

After viewing the video clip, commercial, or other form of multimedia-based material, students can be paired to engage in a number of activities that allow them to experiment and reproduce the language. The focus of the activities should be on communication to meet students’ needs, goals, and expectations. Activities can focus on certain differences in the language, such as colloquial expressions or idioms. Students can
also use the guidance of multimedia-based materials to imitate intonation patterns (Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006). For more advanced students, the activities could afford more agency and allow students to ask questions about the video, comment on cultural practices or differences, or discuss the product being sold in the case of a commercial (Yang, 1995). This discussion can be a very important tool for teaching pragmatics such as speech acts (e.g., apologizing, giving advice, or declining an invitation).

Another example of activities using authentic texts involves the creation of students’ own commercials/soap operas. These activities could focus on a wide range of classroom goals, cultural aspects, or linguistic elements that engage the students, while also providing necessary context for the skill being studied.

**Conclusion**

As aforementioned, teachers’ ability to efficiently use multimedia-delivered materials in the L2 classroom has been greatly enhanced as a result of technological advances through digitization of materials and better access through the Internet. As a result, teachers can provide students with a wide range of opportunities to use the Spanish language to actually communicate. Furthermore, teachers can present virtually any Spanish linguistic or cultural scenario to their students, resulting in numerous opportunities to both increase student motivation toward acquiring Spanish, and to test students’ linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding. This also allows students to communicate within their respective comfort zones when needed.

To effectively implement technology-delivered authentic texts into the Spanish class, teachers can construct various activities to emphasize a certain skill students are studying and developing. Teachers can flexibly tailor the material to expound on a
particular linguistic aspect by showing authentic examples of various Spanish accents, pragmatics, and other cultural practices. These linguistic and cultural differences can be exposed through commercials and other media that provide a contextualized setting in which these differences are manifested. Other benefits include increased student motivation and greater exposure to language use in authentic settings. All of these benefits are provided to the students through a medium whose main purpose is to entertain and engage the viewer.

In summary, by using authentic texts to teach Spanish as a foreign language, teachers can not only help students increase their linguistic abilities, but also help expose them to the cultural richness of the various Spanish speaking cultures throughout the world. In doing so, students will become more engaged and motivated to acquire and use the Spanish language, both inside and outside of the classroom.
LITERACY ARTIFACT

An assessment of language services for Hispanic English language learners in Cache County, Utah
Introduction and Reflection

This paper was written for Dr. Karin de Jonge-Kannan in the Linguistics 6010 course, *Research in Second Language Learning*. I originally wrote this paper with a partner, Valarie Jackson, and later incorporated some changes as I prepared it for my portfolio. I chose to include this paper in my portfolio because of the inspiration it has given me to take a closer look at the lives of the many ELL immigrants, refugees, and others residing in Cache County, Utah (CCU), several of whom I taught as an ESL intern at the English Language Center of Cache Valley.

As we studied the literature on adult ESL programs and other language services offered in CCU and elsewhere in the US, we noticed that there is currently a lack of resources offered to help Hispanic ELLs become integrated into the community, both in the workplace and in other important community resources (hospitals, banks, etc.). This paper discusses the plan Valarie and I have made—patterned after Pawan and Thomalla’s (2005) study conducted in Indiana—to assess the language services provided in CCU. These language services include workplace ESL courses, translation of important documents such as utility bills, and community cultural events that promote better understanding and appreciation of the various cultures represented in CCU.

We expected to carry out this study in CCU, to expose the strengths and weaknesses of the language services currently provided, and subsequently work with the local community stakeholders to improve these services. Therefore, the following artifact is focused on the Hispanic ELLs within the CCU. However, after writing this artifact and including it in my portfolio, I have begun teaching in Park City, located in Summit County, Utah (SCU). This county is similar to CCU in that many immigrants work in
Park City, largely in the tourism industry. Of more particular interest to this artifact is each county’s Hispanic population. In 2012, people of Hispanic origin made up 11.6% of the total population of SCU (United States Census Bureau, 2013c) compared to 10.1% of CCU (United Census Bureau, 2013b). This makes the study and its results applicable to not only CCU but also SCU and other similar counties throughout the US. Furthermore, these results will have implications for both Hispanic ELLs and ELLs of other native languages. Lastly, the knowledge that I have gained from working on this artifact and that which I will gain by carrying out this study will help me better understand my students and their backgrounds.

As a DLI teacher in Park City, I teach a variety of students, many of whose parents are Hispanic ELLs themselves. Thus, by gaining a better understanding of my students and their parents regarding the struggles they face with learning English and adjusting to the cultural aspects of the local area, I can relate to them better and give them the individual attention and feedback they need. This improved understanding contributes to a higher willingness to communicate (WTC) within the students as individuals and collectively, and can help me make my students’ (and their parents’) interaction with the local native English speaking community an integral part of my teaching.
Background

The state of Utah is currently undergoing several changes in immigration laws and foreign language teaching, which create a unique atmosphere to focus research on ELLs. Because of the current increased emphasis on becoming proficient in the Spanish language, each of these changes improves general awareness and appreciation for language and cultural diversity, both on the state level, and in individual counties, particularly in CCU.

Dual Language Immersion in Utah

One change in particular that affects ELLs and the English language services provided them in CCU is the legislation passed in 2008 that provides funding for DLI programs throughout the state of Utah. DLI programs differ from mainstream US public school programs in that students are ‘immersed’ in two languages—their native language and a foreign language such as Chinese, French, Portuguese, or Spanish—by receiving part of their instruction completely in the foreign language. There are typically two types of immersion programs, one-way and two-way. One-way programs “[serve] a student population comprised of a predominant majority of native English language speakers with limited to no proficiency in the L2”, while in two-way programs “at least one-third of students native speakers of the L2. Two-way Immersion programs are sometimes called two-way bilingual or Dual Language” (The Joint National Committee for Languages & The National Council for Languages and International Studies, p. 2).

Backed by two governors and the state superintendent, and supported by parents and teachers, the DLI program goals of implementing 100 DLI schools in the state of Utah, with a total student enrollment of 30,000 (The Joint National Committee for
Languages & The National Council for Languages and International Studies, n.d.; Porter, 2012) will be met in 2014, a year earlier than projected. More particularly in CCU, both of its school districts began implementing DLI programs during the 2013–2014 academic school year. While the results of changing the education system to accommodate languages other than English have yet to be researched, we can assume that a greater awareness of ELLs will accompany these education changes, since a number of students in two-way DLI programs come from families in which one or both parents are ELLs. Many of these ELLs are immigrants from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries.

Immigration Laws and Education Issues

In 2011, the state of Utah proposed a set of five immigration laws that has come to be known as the Utah Solution. These laws include “provisions for tighter enforcement ([law] HB497), a guest worker plan (HB116), a migrant worker partnership with Mexico (HB466), an immigrant sponsorship program (HB469), and employee verification and employer sanctions (HB116)” (Romboy, 2011, para. 7). Although the laws do not provide a pathway to citizenship, they do afford opportunities for legal and illegal immigrants to live and work in Utah. It is also logical to expect local businesses to view the Utah Solution as an open door to an expanding workforce, since CCU is home to factories and farms with a history of employing ELLs (for example, JB). Because of these growing opportunities for immigrants to find work, there are direct implications for research involving an increasing population of potential ELLs in CCU.

With the rising number of ELLs in the county comes the important task of helping each ELL student succeed academically. In the state of Utah as a whole, 26% of Hispanic students dropped out of high school in 2010 (Williams, Ortiz, & Spicer-Escalante, 2012).
A major factor for Utah ranking fourth in the nation for Hispanic dropout rates is a growing population paired with a culturally based discrepancy in what constitutes ‘education’ (Valenzuela, 1999). The Latino/Latina Voices Project (Williams et al., 2012) highlights a norm in Hispanic groups that learning includes not only education, but acquiring English and the cultural norms of the native speaker population, as well (Williams et al., 2012). By helping to satisfy this norm through offering adult ELLs, more opportunities to return to formal education and English language services after an absence (Menard-Warwick, 2005), the community members of CCU can enable Hispanic ELLs to acquire English and its accompanying cultural norms.

In response to CCU’s immigrant community, we seek to learn about Hispanic ELLs in the county, analyze current language services, and offer suggestions to increase the quality and accessibility of current and future language services. Soliciting input from ELLs, language service providers, and employers not only increases data validity, but also increases the likelihood of community involvement in helping ELLs become more integrated in the community.

In this study, the term language services is defined as any ESL course—be it in an education building, in the workplace, or elsewhere—as well as translation services and other means of helping ELLs become integrated into the community. Examples of language services fit several formats: formal, multi-level ESL class offerings; workplace trainings which focus on specific vocabulary or cultural expectations; skills classes taught in English (e.g., driver’s education); and informal language partners within a community. ‘English Language Learner’ denotes Hispanic ELLs living or working in the geographic location of Cache Valley, which is comprised of cities such as Logan, Smithfield, and
Providence, Utah (among other smaller cities in CCU). While CCU is home to other ethnic groups of ELLs, this study is focused on the culture, language, and attitudes of Hispanic ELLs.

Another term used frequently in this study is community. MacQueen et al. (2001), describes community as “a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (p. 1936). This can include groups of church members, co-workers, neighbors, people who shop and interact at the same market, students and teachers, and families. In other words, the term community in this study is used to describe groups of people who use language to interact on (at least) a weekly basis.

For ELLs to succeed in CCU (and in any community), they must be given opportunities to be English. As this artifact discusses the need to assess all the language services offered to ELLs in CCU, it can uncover several potential opportunities in which the business owners, educators, and other community members of CCU can help ELLs acquire the English language.

**Literature Review**

*A Learning Environment for ELLs*

One of the most important aspects in second language acquisition (SLA) is an environment that fosters language learning. For this reason, policy makers and language service providers must consider learning context (i.e. where, with whom, and under what conditions the students are taught English) when planning for ELLs, since ELLs in community contexts, including workplace courses, have a unique set of needs and expectations that cannot be ignored (Collentine & Freed, 2004). For example, Katz
(2000) studied a small Hispanic population working at a factory and found that in workplace ESL classes, it is not just the English language that is being taught, but also a culture that managers and employers want employees to adopt. If company objectives and policies are not clearly communicated, conflicts may arise within the workplace.

Another unique aspect of the learning environment for many ELLs in CCU is the higher level of stress and anxiety associated with acquiring English as a second language in a community-based, adult education setting. One common example is that ELLs may take time away from English class because of the stress of providing for families and the perceived pressures to assimilate into a new society (Callahan, 2005; Lambert, 2009; Menard-Warwick, 2005). Perhaps it is because of this anxiety that many Hispanic ELLs do not take advantage of local language services, as there is no correlation between a community offering language services and ELLs using them.

A possible explanation may be found in a concept called *imagined communities* (Anderson, 1991; Yasuko & Norton, 2003). Within the imagined community, a learner creates an identity based on self-perception and community factors of influence. Norton (2001) elucidates how non-participation makes a strong statement of identity for the ELL who views his or her identity as underprivileged or as having a language problem. In short, ELLs’ identity, stress level, and learning environment are all important factors to consider in the assessment of the English language services provided in CCU.

*Resources and Support from the Community*

Other factors to consider when assessing the language services offered in CCU are the demographics of the local population. Spicer-Escalante (2012), who interviewed sixteen Hispanic people living in CCU, and Ortiz (2012) both report the lifestyles, work environments, and Spanish and English language use found within Hispanic communities
in CCU. They also allude to the growing number of Hispanic people in the area—approximately 10% of CCU’s total population, as aforementioned. CCU’s immigrants work in a variety of settings, including factories, restaurants, and farms—professions that do not require high levels of English proficiency.

Within these workplaces and without, ELLs are often in direct contact with native English speakers in a process called socialization. It is highly important that ELLs have opportunities to socialize with native English speakers of the community (Bell, 2000), since the process of socialization, both inside and outside of the work environment, is an integral part of most immigrants’ English language learning experiences in the US (Li, 2000). To aid in this process, adult ESL education courses should teach not only academic English, but also practical, social English abilities to help ELLs through the socialization process. These valuable skills include nonverbal, interpersonal English and multicultural communication (Duff, Wong, & Early, 2000). If the resources provided by the community align with the needs of local ELLs, by providing them with the English skills and abilities they need to become integrated in the community, both the community and the ELLs can benefit. These benefits can include, for example, improved company efficiency, as employees and employers can communicate better.

Pedagogical Considerations for ELL programs

As mentioned earlier, it is important to teach ELLs not only academic English (i.e., the type of English used in schools and other education settings) but also social English (used in everyday speech) to help them integrate into the local community. Bell (2000) extends this idea, emphasizing that rather than focusing on American pronunciation or simple comprehension, students should receive training on how to read
texts in more complex ways. Further studies of ESL literacy instruction advocate for curriculums tethered to technology training (Mathews-Aydinli, 2008). Another integral part of language teaching is pragmatics training (e.g., advocating for oneself in the workplace, interacting properly with one’s child’s teacher at parent-teacher conference, or returning a damaged item to a store). All of this language training can also be expanded into the community, since opportunities to interact in the community raise the levels of English proficiency and motivation for ELLs (Han, 2009).

This idea of community is paramount, since one of the main objectives of community-based ESL programs is to help ELLs become integrated into the community, with the acquisition of English being a means of achieving this goal (Dytynyshyn, 2008). Furthermore, the concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 2011) suggests that ELLs become part of a community as they interact regularly with community members and share common concerns with them. As a result, ELLs that interact with members of the target population not only develop broader skill sets, but also form lasting bonds with other members of the community, particularly native English speakers. These bonds can have lasting effects on ELLs, not the least of which being increased English proficiency, thus increasing ‘buy-in’ from ESL instructors and other ELLs (Powers, 2004).

In summary, ELLs are best equipped to learn English and become integrated into the community when they are provided with various opportunities to learn and use English, both academic and more practical, social English. As they are given opportunities to learn—whether it be in the workplace, in a community-based ESL center, or elsewhere—and then to put the language into practice as active members of their community, they can move through the socialization process and become a valuable
asset to their community. For these reasons, we investigate a number of research questions.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide this study of language services for Hispanic ELLs living in CCU:

1. How do adult Hispanic ELLs in CCU perceive the language services offered?
2. What barriers prevent ELLs from using language services?
3. What services (banks, hospitals, grocery stores, etc.) are ELLs more likely to use, and why?
4. What types of expected learner outcomes are held by language service providers?

**Methodology**

*Participants*

The study will use a tiered approach to analyze the attitudes of ELLs living in CCU and the language services they are currently provided (see Figure 1). Beginning at the first and broadest level, the study will focus on the collective community to identify the language services offered and begin finding participants. This level will include ELLs, language service providers, and policy makers. Members representing each of these groups will be interviewed, though participation in the interviews and other portions of the study is completely voluntary and all participants will remain anonymous. ELL participants will be students at the local adult ESL center who are willing to participate, as well as employees in some of the most prominent workplaces that employ non-native English speakers. Language service providers will include those at the local ESL center, public schools, workplaces that offer language classes, and other community
members that provide language services such as translation. Lastly, policy makers represented in this study will include local government officials, school board members, and business owners.

Table 1 Tiered Approach to Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELLs</th>
<th>Connected community members</th>
<th>Community leaders and policy makers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Those that are using language services</td>
<td>• Language teachers</td>
<td>• City council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Those that are not using language</td>
<td>• Translators</td>
<td>• School board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>services</td>
<td>• Volunteers</td>
<td>• Business owners</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Factory foremen</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

In the first stage of data collection, a strategic interest group made up of language service providers, local policy makers, and some ELLs will gather to evaluate the language services offered in CCU based on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis model (Pawan & Thomalla, 2005). To perform a SWOT analysis, the language service providers of CCU will be engaged in a “reflective discussion and investigation of the language services in the context of [the] community,” and we will later “present findings in a way that [helps language service providers] become quickly aware of all aspects of the findings” (Pawan & Thomalla, 2005, p. 686). Participants will have opportunities to brainstorm the strengths and weaknesses of the individual services and the collective opportunities and threats found throughout CCU. The group will meet three times during the study period, with more meetings added if necessary.
Nine of the most prominent institutions in CCU in which many Hispanic ELLs work, study, or worship, have been identified as currently offering language services and/or employing a large population of ELLs (see Table 2). These institutions are classified by category—schools, factories, community resources, and churches—and whether or not ESL classes are offered is also indicated.

For the second stage of research, an open-ended questionnaire will be administered to ELLs, followed by informal interviews to gather information about their perceptions of language services offered in CCU. The questionnaire will be provided in written and oral formats, in both English and Spanish, with questions similar to those used by Pawan and Thomalla (2005). Contact will be maintained with the respondents of the study through informal interviews until we have finished collecting the data.

*Data Analysis*

The third stage of research will occur after the questionnaire is administered and interviews have been completed, and will involve meeting with the stakeholders and ELLs again. Data collected from ELLs will inform the brainstorming and listing of SWOT throughout the second meeting. Participants will be encouraged to reassess the SWOT analysis conducted in the first meeting by applying data collected from ELLs about language services. In the final interest group gathering, participants will work to develop short- and long-term goals for both the individual institutions and CCU with an aim to improve the overall accessibility both of ESL classes throughout the CCU and other language services necessary for immigrants residing in CCU to become integrated into the community.
Table 2 Nine Institutions Serving ELLs in CCU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of Institution</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>ESL Classes Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>English Language Center</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logan City Schools, Adult Education Program</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Resources</td>
<td>Department of Workforce Services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factories</td>
<td>Pepperidge Farm</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JBS/Millers</td>
<td>Hybrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>LDS- Hyrum Stake South Cache Spanish Branch</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AG-La Casa Del Alfarero</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic-Saint Thomas Aquinas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logan Seventh-day Adventist Church</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results and Conclusion**

Based on preliminary findings through informal conversation, an analysis of the language services provided to Hispanic ELLs in CCU is expected to indicate a need for advertisements of services in Spanish, open schedules for language classes, and an updated curriculum including technology. Depending on the results from the SWOT analysis, these language classes could include not only ESL classes for the ELL population, but also Spanish classes for native English speakers, particularly those who interact with Hispanic immigrants on a regular basis.

Transportation may also be a factor as to whether or not some Hispanic ELLs take advantage of the language services. Thus, it is anticipated that the local language services and transportation services could align their schedules to increase ESL class attendance. Likewise, we expect a clearer picture regarding the awareness and perceptions that ELLs
have concerning the language services provided, which will guide language service
providers as they help ELLs improve English language proficiency and encourage
integration into the community.

We also hope to identify reasons for non-participation from ELLs, as well as
reasons why some workplaces have stopped offering ESL classes for their employees.
These findings will be used to formulate a plan for improving the language services and
helping the ELL population take advantage of these services. As was the case with Pawan
and Thomalla (2005), local leaders, educators, employers, and other community members
will be able to set short- and long-term goals to implement the suggestions provided by
the study, based on the data collected.

Short-term goals could include subscriptions to a translation services hotline and
translating all important local documents (e.g., utility bills) into Spanish and other
languages spoken by local ELLs. Long-term goals might include developing agreements
among local businesses to combine efforts and resources to offer ESL classes. We will
also recommend community cultural events in which people from various backgrounds
can share their culture and, as a result, build a sense of multicultural appreciation among
community members.

By gaining a clearer picture of the language services provided to Hispanic ELLs
in CCU, as well as the perceptions these ELLs have regarding the services, the
community of CCU will be able to increase overall English language proficiency of the
population, as well as break down the perceived barriers that have previously separated
many ELLs and native English speakers.
Limitations of this study

As mentioned above, this study will focus on the Hispanic ELLs of CCU, rather than on the general population of ELLs in the county, though future research could include an in-depth language and culture study of ELLs living in CCU whose native language is not Spanish. Some examples of future study participants include the growing population of immigrants from the Marshall Islands and refugee populations from Cambodia and Burma.

Another limitation of this study is regarding the quality of the ESL classes offered in CCU. While this study examines the language services offered in CCU from a broad perspective, future research should include an in-depth evaluation of the curriculum adhered to each of the ESL courses offered throughout CCU. As an ESL teacher in the US and other countries, I have noticed a slight inconsistency between the methodology that ESL teachers are encouraged to use (namely, CLT) and the methodology reflected in course textbooks and other materials, which tend to display tenets of the ALM.
CULTURE ARTIFACT

Declining an invitation in American English: What research shows
Introduction and Reflection

I wrote this paper for my Culture Teaching and Learning (i.e., Linguistics 6900) class with Dr. Karin de Jonge-Kannan. The process of writing this paper has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my MSLT experience, mostly because as I read through the literature on declining an invitation, I learned a great deal about my own culture and about why I think, act, and talk the way I do. This has helped me step out of my own way of thinking and analyze why people from other cultures might have treated me the way they did, and why I have felt awkward or offended in certain cases. It has also helped me be much more aware of the various factors that influence my international students in the way they think, act, and talk, enabling me to be a more empathetic and reflective teacher.

The paper is an important part of my portfolio because it describes my ideas of how to teach one of the most important speech acts to my ESL students, declining an invitation from an American English speaker (AE). It is based on a literature review of cross-cultural studies focused on declining an invitation and includes my personal conclusions on the underlying reasons for these findings. I also include a sample lesson plan for teaching this speech act.

While this artifact is focused mainly on teaching adult and adolescent ELLs, my current employment as an elementary DLI teacher provides an opportunity to apply these principles to a younger group of ELLs, since these students also face the challenge of declining an invitation offered by someone of perceived higher, equal, and lower status. For example, at school, a student may decline the invitation of his/her teacher (i.e., someone of a perceived higher status) to attend a school-sponsored afterschool event.
Later, during recess, the same student might be invited by a friend (i.e., perceived equal status) to go to his/her house after school. Upon arriving home, the student might then be asked by his/her younger sibling (perceived lower status) if s/he wants to play a video game. Thus, I believe the principles discussed herein, as well as my accompanying lesson plan, can be applied and adapted to ELLs of all age levels and linguistic ability.

In addition to its applicability to a variety of learners, this artifact also discusses concepts that are seldom discussed in many second language classes, particularly in elementary education. Such concepts include the various ways in which an American native English speaker might decline a person’s invitation, such as showing gratitude and/or positive opinion about the invitation or event, by offering an excuse, or by apologizing to the inviter for declining the invitation.

Likewise, this artifact also addresses some of the cultural differences in declining an invitation, discussing the way in which American native English speakers perform this speech act compared to the way in which native speakers of other languages—Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Latin American Spanish, Persian, and Thai—do so. By helping students gain a clearer understanding of these concepts and the cultural differences exhibited in declining an invitation, teachers can help students avoid many of the cultural misunderstandings that can occur when declining an invitation of an American native English speaker.
Background

When ESL instructors in universities across the United States interact with nonnative English language learners (ELLs) on a regular basis, it soon becomes apparent that simply knowing the proper grammar and vocabulary of a language does not necessarily enable ELLs to communicate effectively. The ability to communicate appropriately is known as communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Campbell & Wales, 1970; Canale, 1983) and is composed of several types of competences, including pragmatic competence (i.e., an understanding of and sensitivity to the target culture), which is a central focus of this paper. As we will see, it is important to develop pragmatic competence, particularly in regards to how to effectively decline an invitation in a second language.

Thus, with the goal of helping university ESL students in the US avoid becoming ‘fluent fools’ (Bennett, 1993), this paper discusses the pragmatically appropriate ways to decline an invitation of an American English speaker (AE). The paper is divided into three main categories—interacting with someone of perceived 1) higher, 2) equal, or 3) lower social status. The teaching of this speech act is designed for adult ESL students of intermediate to advanced proficiency, in intensive English university programs or in adult education in the community. I argue that it is possible to improve pragmatic competence of ELLs through explicit pragmatic instruction, and as part of this paper, I present a set of lesson plans that demonstrate how to teach the speech act of declining the invitation of an AE.
Pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence, as mentioned above, entails sensitivity to the ways in which people of the target culture interact with language. Indeed, pragmatics can be defined as “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (Crystal, 1985, p. 240). I believe learning a language involves not only mere grammar and vocabulary, but also acquiring pragmatic competence in the second language. Thomas (1983) explains this idea: “While grammatical error may reveal a speaker to be a less than proficient language-user, pragmatic failure reflects badly on him/her as a person” (p. 97, italics in original).

Pragmatic failure can be especially noticeable within the speech act of declining an invitation. Al-Kahtani (2005) points out the importance of accurately declining an invitation, in that “how one says ‘no’ is more important in many societies than the answer itself…. The interlocutor must know when to use the appropriate form and its function, the speech act and its social elements depending on each group and their cultural-linguistic values” (p. 36). In other words, even if a person has acquired a native-like fluency in a language, if s/he is not culturally sensitive enough, s/he will possibly encounter awkward or embarrassing situations that can negatively affect the amount and type of interaction s/he has with other native speakers. In turn, this reduced amount of interaction can negatively affect a learner’s acquisition of the second language. For this reason, language learners must develop sensitivity to the target culture.

The word 'culture' has been defined in various ways, but I prefer, for the purposes
of this paper, Cornes’ (2004) definition, “the acquired learning of a group that gives its members a sense of who they are, of belonging, of how they should behave, and of what they should be doing; culture makes that group recognizably different from other groups” (p. 103). In the following literature review, I explain some of the integral components that make up US culture, since they play an important role in how AEs decline an invitation. Based on a review of the literature, I argue that there is less of a distinction between how one declines an invitation of someone of a perceived higher, equal, or lower status in the US culture than there is in other cultures throughout the world.

**How AEs typically decline an invitation**

Much research has been done regarding the speech act of declining an invitation. Cross-cultural studies of this speech act have compared the American English language with many other languages, including Arabic (Al-Kahtani, 2005), Chinese (Chang, 2009; Chen, 2011), Japanese (Al-Kahtani, 2005; Beebe et al., 1990), Korean (Kwon, 2004), Latin American Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; Soler & Pitarch, 2010), Persian (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar, 2011), Thai (Wannaruk, 2008), and several others. To study refusals, researchers have typically used discourse completion tests (DCTs) (Beebe et al., 1990), which are “written questionnaires including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialog with an empty slot for the speech act under study” (Kasper & Dahl, 1991, p. 221). In the empty slot, “subjects provide the speech act under study to complete the dialog” (Kwon, 2004, p. 341). For an example of a DCT, please see Appendix 1.

By using DCTs, researchers have discovered several differences comparing AEs with native speakers of other languages regarding the way in which they decline an
One of the most salient features that distinguish AEs from native speakers of other languages when declining an invitation relates to reduced importance of perceived status levels. While in some cultures, a speaker uses different language forms when speaking to listeners of higher, equal, or lower perceived status, in AE culture there is less of a distinction, a result of the egalitarian society in which they live. In this regard, Kohl (1984) writes:

[AEs] say all people have been ‘created equal.’ Most [AEs] believe that God views all humans alike without regard to intelligence, physical condition or economic status. In secular terms this belief is translated into the assertion that all people have an equal opportunity to succeed in life … Many highly-placed foreign visitors to the United States are insulted by the way they are treated by service personnel (such as waiters in restaurants, clerks in stores, taxi drivers, etc.) … Newcomers to the United States should realize that no insult or personal indignity is intended by this lack of deference to rank or position in Society. A foreigner should be prepared to be considered "just like anybody else" while in the country (as cited in Jason & Posner, 1995, p. 7).

While social classes do exist in the United States, the notion that all people are created equal, written in the Preamble to the US Constitution, is deeply rooted in AE society. Cornes (2004) explains the values of an egalitarian society: “Inequalities between people should be minimized;” “we should treat each other as equals;” “harmony exists between the powerful and the powerless if each accepts the skills and worth of the other;” and “flatter organizational structures are seen as more progressive” (p. 116). The concept
of ‘flatter organizational structures’ emphasizes a lesser distinction among social statuses, and this applies to the way in which AEs decline an invitation.

Another distinguishing feature of AEs when declining an invitation, which is also similar across status levels, is the level of directness. Many international students might feel somewhat offended at first by this level of directness, but there is an underlying reason why AEs are so direct, and it is found in the “highly individualistic culture” in which AEs live (Cornes, 2004, p. 111). In an individualistic society such as that of the United States, “an individual has learned to act independently from other members of the group or society to which he or she belongs” (Cornes, 2004, p. 111). As Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, and Tipton phrase it, “[AEs] believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual” (p. 142, as cited in Hollins, 1996).

Because of the individualistic AE society, many AEs “[prefer] to express messages directly and clearly” (Chang, 2009, p. 490), because to them, “anything other than the most direct and open approach [is] dishonest and insincere” (Jason & Posner, 1995, p. 10). This is important to remember both when declining an invitation and when encountering a declination offered by an AE. Jason and Posner (1995) claim: “[AEs] will quickly lose confidence in and distrust anyone who hints at what is intended rather than saying it outright” (pp. 10–11, italics in original).

To explain how Americans typically decline invitations, many authors have divided their explanations into three categories. As mentioned above, much work has compared AEs with other languages/cultures in regards to interlocutors of perceived higher, equal, and lower status, since in many cultures social status plays a role in the selection of strategies for declining an invitation (see Chang, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer,
2003). Though in other cultures the response may vary if the interlocutor is of a higher status (such as a professor, boss, or civic leader), of equal status (such as a friend, classmate, or colleague), or of lower status (such as an employee or one’s child), the response does not vary as much in American English. Nonetheless, in this article, AEs’ method of declining invitations will be discussed, first in a general sense, followed by the more specific interactions that take place between interlocutors (in this case, inviters) of higher, equal, and lower status.

In general

For AEs, politeness and clarity are key to declining an invitation, since they are tied to the concept of ‘face’, which Brown and Levinson (1978) define as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for [oneself]” (p. 61), and divide face into two aspects: 1) Positive face, which deals with “the desire to be liked, involved, and included” (LoCastro, 2012, p. 137), and 2) negative face, which involves the desire “to remain undisturbed, not imposed upon, in one’s actions” (LoCastro, 2012, pp. 137-138).

Within the speech act of refusals, positive face and negative face both play an integral role. For example, the invitee wants the inviter to feel liked and appreciated (positive face), and thus might begin the refusal by thanking him/her for the invitation. The invitee might follow the expression of gratitude by apologizing and giving a reason for which s/he declines the invitation, and perhaps provide an alternative (e.g., “I’m sorry, I can’t go because I have a meeting at that time. I’d love to go next week, though”). By providing a reason and an alternative, the invitee shows that s/he does not want to disturb or impose upon the inviter’s actions, thus preserving his/her negative face. In short, the concept of face is particularly important to remember in the context of declining an invitation because “a speaker needs to strike a balance between clarity and
politeness in conveying his/her refusal message” (Chang, 2009, p. 478). Below I will discuss this balance to which Chang refers.

One typical attribute of AEs when declining an invitation is that AEs are quite direct, often using a direct ‘no’ (Chang, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003), depending on the social status of the listener (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003). They are generally quite clear in their excuses, as well (Al-Kahtani, 2005), though some researchers declare AEs as less clear and specific than native Chinese speakers (Chang, 2009).

Just as the level of directness is important to consider when AEs decline an invitation, so is the level of vagueness when giving an explanation or excuse for declining. Chang (2009), who compares native Mandarin Chinese speakers with AEs, finds AEs to be quite vague in their excuses (e.g., ‘We have plans for next Sunday’) because of cultural differences “in the needs of privacy and the views of what excuses seem to be persuasive,” and because “specific excuses such as a toothache often generate a follow-up interaction … [which] could have very damaging consequences to the relationship … regardless of the refuser’s status” (p. 486). This idea of privacy stems from the highly individualistic AE culture.

Regarding the semantic order (i.e., the order of components such as gratitude, excuse, and refusal) for declining an invitation made by an AE, most often, one expresses gratitude and thanks the listener before declining the invitation (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar, 2011), usually through an excuse or an explanation (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003). One might also use an adjunct such as positive opinion (e.g., ‘That sounds wonderful’) to decline an invitation (Chang, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003).
Higher status

When AEs decline the invitation of someone of a perceived higher status, there tends to be a semantic order for declining. In most DCTs, the situation in which an AE must decline the invitation of someone of a higher status is when one’s boss invites one to a party on short notice. According to the research, AEs most often begin by expressing regret (e.g., ‘I’m sorry’) (Al-Kahtani, 2005; Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar, 2011) or a positive feeling (e.g., ‘I’d love to’) (Wannaruk, 2008), followed by an explanation or an excuse (e.g., ‘I already have plans’) (Al-Kahtani, 2005; Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar, 2011; Wannaruk, 2008), and sometimes appreciation (e.g., ‘I appreciate the invitation’). They also tend to promise future acceptance (e.g., ‘next time I’d love to come’) (Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, AEs are relatively direct, even when declining the invitation of someone of a higher status (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar, 2011). Though they rarely use the direct ‘no’ (Wannaruk, 2008), they often express negative ability or willingness (e.g., ‘I can’t’ or ‘I’d rather not’), though perhaps less frequently than native Chinese speakers (Chang, 2009).

Equal status

The level of directness with which AEs decline an invitation of a superior tends to be even higher when declining an invitation extended by their perceived equals. Various studies agree on the semantic order in which AEs decline an invitation to someone of equal status, such as a friend or a coworker. For the DCT scenario in which one must decline a friend’s invitation to have dinner at his/her house, AEs usually begin with a positive feeling such as ‘I’d love to’ (Al-Kahtani, 2005; Beebe et al., 1990), then give an
excuse or explanation for why they decline the invitation (Al-Kahtani, 2005; Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar, 2011; Wannaruk, 2008). A few, somewhat unique, traits of AE refusals to people of equal status is the use of a direct ‘no’ (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Wannaruk, 2008), regret (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar, 2011), pause fillers (e.g., ‘Uh’) (Allami & Naeimi, 2011), and negative willingness (e.g., ‘I’d rather not’).

**Lower status**

Finally, when declining the invitation of someone of perceived lower status, AEs usually begin with a positive agreement such as gratitude, followed by an explanation or excuse (Al-Kahtani, 2005; Wannaruk, 2008), though some research indicates that excuses are slightly less frequently used toward listeners of lower status than equal or higher status (Allami & Naeimi, 2011). Other utterances include negative willingness (perhaps with a direct ‘no’) (Wannaruk, 2008), gratitude, and a rather unique characteristic of lower status refusals, postponement (e.g., ‘I’ll check my schedule and get back to you’) (Al-Kahtani, 2005). Wannaruk (2008) gives an example from her study, describing how AEs begin the speech act of declining an invitation: "[AEs] usually began their refusal with ‘gratitude’ or ‘regret’ followed by ‘explanation’ (e.g., ‘Sorry, but I’m not prepared enough to address the group. Maybe next time’, ‘Thanks, I’m honored, but I am really too busy’)") (p. 323). As is evident from the aforementioned literature, ELLs should be taught how to decline an invitation in a pragmatically appropriate manner.

**Effectively teaching how to decline an invitation**

I agree with Soler and Pitarch (2010) and Archer (2010) that it is possible to teach the speech act of declining an invitation and help learners improve their pragmatic
competence. Archer explains that to teach how to decline an invitation, the instructor should teach both the language necessary to do so (as described above) and the “nonverbal features of the speech act, such as the speaker’s tone of voice (e.g., questioning or hesitant), gestures (e.g., a shrug, nod, or head tilt), and facial expressions (e.g., a slight frown or scrunched eyebrows)” (p. 183). She also recommends a discussion comparing possible cultural differences in the meaning of those nonverbal cues.

Saito and Beecken (1997) suggest a three-step approach to teaching speech acts, and I believe it can be adapted to declining an invitation. They suggest to first introduce the typical use of the speech act, then “teach a variety of appropriate uses, and [third, encourage] learners to make their own choices regarding appropriate use” (p. 373). In my sample lesson plan (see Appendix 2), I demonstrate how to follow this three-step approach.

First, I begin with a brief warm-up exercise, similar to the one Archer (2010) suggests, by displaying on the projector a (false) invitation to a class study session on Saturday at 7 a.m. Naturally, most students would decline the invitation, which is the goal for this activity. I then walk around the room and invite a few students to the study session, taking note of how they respond. After inviting a few students, we review as a class the ways in which students declined the invitation. This serves as an introduction for the topic of the class.

Following the introduction, I give a brief presentation, adapted from Archer (2010), on the importance of using certain words, phrases and body language that convey politeness in AE culture. The presentation uses a fragile, yet repairable, object such as a Legos figure, which represents a person’s relationship with an inviter. The object is
dropped from two to four feet in the air onto a sheet of paper labeled ‘direct refusal’. Naturally, the object breaks on impact, which demonstrates that sometimes when a person simply says ‘no’ when invited to an event, the inviter could feel embarrassed or offended. I then describe ways to ‘soften’ the refusal, such as gratitude, positive agreement, an excuse, or promising future acceptance, each softener represented by a small sheet of felt. As I describe each softener, I stack it on top of ‘direct refusal’ and other softeners. Then, after the explanation, I drop the Lego object again onto the pile, and this time it should not break, representing a successful refusal of the invitation, in which both people are as comfortable as possible. I can take this moment to explain that with a person of higher status, one might usually need to use more softeners than a plain, direct refusal. After the demonstration, I help students solidify the concept of declining an invitation through an authentic example or two from popular television programs or movies.

Once students have been introduced to the process of declining an invitation, student pairs or small groups complete a refusal sequence activity (Archer, 2010). For this activity, I distribute a few scenarios in which one must decline an invitation, along with color-coded responses to an invitation, each color representing a type of response, such as gratitude (e.g., ‘thank you’ or ‘thanks’), pause-fillers (e.g., ‘um’ or ‘well’), or future promises (e.g., ‘I’d love to next time’ or ‘After I finish ______ I can’). Student pairs or small groups will then organize the color-coded phrases into an utterance to decline the invitation. We conclude the activity with a short class discussion in which students share the responses they provided, which shows that there are various ways to
decline an invitation appropriately. It also provides an opportunity for the teacher to offer any necessary feedback or advice.

To continue to build students’ pragmatic competence in declining an invitation, I assign an activity in which student pairs or small groups design their own scenarios for declining an invitation. To do so, I distribute two note cards per pair, and have students write a scenario at the top of each notecard, similar to a DCT. Students then exchange note cards with other pairs, and complete the conversation with a polite form of declining the invitation, based on what we discussed earlier.

The culminating task-based activity (Ellis, 2003) involves a role-play in groups of three. Student 1 invites Student 2 to an event of some type related to students on campus, such as a football game, a movie, or dinner. Student 3 observes the role-play and records the refusal strategies employed by student 2 to decline the invitation. After the short role-play, the group discusses what occurred, and may address me with any questions they may have. They then rotate roles, and repeat the activity twice, each time with a different scenario, so that each student has a turn in each role.

Finally, for the cool-down phase of the lesson, I lead a whole-class discussion to receive feedback from my students to check their comprehension and if they would like to spend more time on the subject during the next class. By using this lesson plan, I enable students to increase their pragmatic competence through paired, group and class activities, and increase their motivation to learn and participate through authentic materials and real-life scenarios chosen by the students.
Conclusion

There are many sources to which an instructor may turn for guidance regarding refusals and how to teach them in various contexts, such as ESL (within a country in which English is an official or widely spoken language) or EFL (within a country in which English is not widely spoken), university or adult/community education. However, I am left with a few questions that could be useful topics for future research.

For example, most of the studies of refusals that I have seen focus on university students, age 18 to 24. I understand that this age group is much more easily accessible for research, but I am curious as to the trends and possible differences in refusal strategies of younger people, such as those in elementary education (like my current DLI students), or older, such as business professionals. Another research question that I suggest is the choice of refusal strategies depending on gender. Allami and Naeimi (2011) also point out a need for research in this area. One study that has piqued my interest in this area is Félix-Brasdefer (2003), where he reports that males tend to be more direct than females when declining an invitation. Investigating gender differences as they relate to refusals appears to be a rich area for further research.

Another valuable research question involves racial differences in choice of refusals. Hollins (1996) explains: “The high value placed on individualism in the Euro-American culture is not necessarily shared by African Americans” (p. 23). The United States has a growing population of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans, and research in this area would be beneficial, particularly for institutions in which the majority of the student body and/or community are not Caucasian.
Finally, research on the implications for teaching refusals and other speech acts in EFL and other settings is very important, as many educators (myself included) teach in both ESL and EFL contexts. Allami and Naeimi (2011) mention one study that has been done on this subject, but further research could provide guidance to educators by studying the resources available to teachers and learners for developing pragmatic competence in areas where English is not widely used. DLI is another subject area that requires further research in the teaching of pragmatics.

The teaching of pragmatics is an important part of building communicative competence in university students studying a foreign language, whether they are studying English or any other language. While in American English there is typically a less noticeable difference between perceived statuses of the person being invited and his/her inviter, it is necessary to point out the slight differences in refusal strategies. Furthermore, by learning the semantic order for declining an invitation offered by AEs, ELLs can improve their pragmatic competence and become better prepared to communicate in a culturally sensitive manner.
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
Refusal Speech Acts

As part of a major paper for my Linguistics 6900 class, *Culture Teaching and Learning*, I searched for information regarding the speech act of declining an invitation. I thoroughly enjoyed the search, mostly because it helped me step outside of myself and view my culture from an objective point of view. During this process, I have also gained a better understanding of the importance of teaching pragmatics (i.e., speech acts such as refusals) as an integral part of the syllabus in a foreign language class. Since refusals are one of the few speech acts in which one risks feeling awkward or embarrassed, whether one is refusing or being refused, it is important that foreign language teachers study refusals. By doing so, teachers can gain a better understanding of the culture associated with the language they teach, including their own, which enables them to help their students develop their pragmatic competence and avoid becoming ‘fluent fools’ (Bennett, 1993), as I mention in my culture artifact.

The following sources offer insight concerning not only declining an invitation, but several other types of refusals, including refusals of suggestion, requests, and others. They also give valuable information about more subtle characteristics of the American English speaking culture, such as individualism and egalitarianism. Lastly, because of the cross-cultural nature of many of the studies, they also provide valuable insight for teachers of foreign languages other than ESL, such as Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Thai, and more.

I begin with Kwon (2004), which has been influential both for me and for researchers such as Allami and Naeimi (2011) (another reference in my culture artifact), who used Kwon’s (2004) data in their own cross-cultural study on refusals. In this study,
Kwon employs Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz’s (1990) discourse completion test (DCT) to compare native Korean speakers and American native English speakers regarding refusals. A DCT is questionnaire-type method of data collection, in which participants read an incomplete dialogue between them and another person, and complete the dialogue by filling in the blank with the dialogue response that they would give in each scenario. One thing that distinguishes Kwon’s (2004) study from others that use the DCT is the detailed explanation of what the DCT is, how it works, and its effectiveness in comparison to other data collection instruments, such as phone conversations. While the DCT does not typically employ oral communication as a sampling tool, one of its greatest strengths is the ability to control the specific variable (e.g., a given speech act) being tested.

Beebe et al.’s (1990) DCT utilizes a questionnaire made up of twelve scenarios, each in dialogue form, that elicit a refusal. There are four types of refusals in the DCT: Refusing 1) an offer (e.g., a boss offers you a promotion that would require you to move to another area); 2) an invitation (e.g., a friend invites you to dinner); 3) a request (e.g., a classmate asks to copy your notes before an exam); and 4) a suggestion (e.g., a friend suggests you try a new diet). Each of these four types includes situations in which one refuses a person of perceived 1) higher status (e.g., one’s boss), 2) equal status (e.g., a colleague), and 3) lower status (e.g., a maid), though the DCT does not make the status distinction explicit. Each dialogue includes a blank space in which participants must write the response they would give in each case, following which a reply from the other person indicates that the participant had made a refusal. The DCT is an effective means for comparing speech acts because “it allows researchers to control the variables of the
situation” (Kwon, 2004, p. 341), and it is a relatively fast way to collect data (Beebe et al., 1990; Kwon, 2004), since participants need only fill in the blank after which the researchers can review participants’ responses and classify them according to their own set of criteria.

Kwon’s (2004) results show that Americans tend to decline an invitation in a similar way, no matter the status level of the person whose invitation they are declining. I believe this reflects the egalitarian society of the United States, compared to a more hierarchical society of Korea. Kwon attributes this difference between the two groups of participants to the Confucian ideology that reigns in Korea, and she references several authors to explain that a vertical society is part of everyday life in Korea, and that there always exists a higher/lower-status relationship between people.

Furthermore, Kwon’s results contrast with Beebe et al.’s (1990) study of ESL refusals, which revealed considerable variation in the refusals of American native English speakers toward people of higher, equal, and lower status. Interestingly enough, each of the other sources included in this annotated bibliography side with Kwon’s results, perhaps because of the changes that have occurred in the US since 1990 regarding the concept of equality. Another important contribution of this study is that, compared to other cross-cultural studies I reviewed, such as Félix-Brasdefer (2003), Kwon’s (2004) study has a relatively large sample size (40 Koreans and 37 Americans).

Perhaps more important to note is the fact that all of her participants were university students between 18 and 24 years old, which provides university teachers of Korean and ESL with a representative sample of interactions with fellow university students to use in class, since most university students are within this age group.
However, the small demographic group is very specific, and cannot be generalizable to the rest of the US or Korean population. This small demographic is common to most of the refusal studies I have read, and can be attributed to the convenience of sampling the students of the universities where researchers work. While research in speech acts, particularly in refusals, is relatively new, future research should expand to other demographic groups, such as middle-aged business professionals, as I mention in my culture artifact.

In another study that uses the DCT to study refusals, Chang (2009) investigates the pragmatic transfer of native speakers of Mandarin speaking English, and includes native speakers of Mandarin speaking Mandarin as well as a group of 35 native English speaking American college students in the study. It is also worth noting that her total sample size is 156 participants, significantly larger than most other studies on refusals.

In this study, Chang employs a DCT similar to Beebe et al.’s (1990) study, and results indicate that American English speakers are more direct than Chinese speakers when refusing. While she found several significant results related to refusals of requests, offers, and suggestions, I focus mostly on refusals to invitations. For example, the Chinese speakers in her study used the negative ability (e.g., ‘I can’t’) and negative willingness (e.g., ‘I’d rather not’) more often than Americans when declining the invitation of someone of higher status. Likewise, the Chinese participants also expressed the wish formula (e.g., ‘I wish I could’) more than the Americans when declining someone of higher status, “to soften the tension caused by the use of the direct refusal” (p. 485). She also discusses differences in specificity when declining an invitation, as Americans tended to be more vague in their reasons for declining the invitation of
Chang’s (2009) contributions to my understanding of collectivism and individualism are also worth noting, as they directly relate to the way in which people decline an invitation. According to Chang, collectivism focuses on the needs and interests of the group as a whole, whereas individualism focuses on the needs and interests of each individual. While the concept of ‘face’ (i.e., the importance placed on politeness and honor towards a group, such as one’s family, business colleagues, etc.) plays a role in all societies, its role is more apparent in collectivistic societies than in individualistic ones. As a result, refusals in a collectivistic society also tend to be quite different than those used in an individualistic society. The knowledge I have gained from this article regarding collectivism and individualism has helped open my eyes to the underlying reasons for which we decline invitations the way we do in the US. The study can also serve as a valuable resource for anyone who currently interacts or will soon interact with native Chinese speakers on a regular basis, such as students preparing to study abroad.

Another reason I include Chang’s (2009) study in my annotated bibliography is because of her clear explanation of the importance of including three data samples (i.e., American native English speakers, Chinese native Mandarin speakers, and Chinese native Mandarin speakers using English) in one study. Ellis (1993), who was one of the first to advocate three sets of data samples, explains: “Only [by studying all three data sets] is it possible to determine [1] to what extent learner performance differs from native-speaker performance and [2] whether the differences are traceable to transfer from the [participants’ native language]” (p. 162). This ‘transfer’ of which Ellis writes is the effect
(positive or negative) that a person’s native language has on his/her use of the new language being learned.

One of the things that have been most beneficial from Chang’s (2009) study is the detailed statistical data, such as z-scores and analyses to detect statistically significant differences among the three groups. This has been of great help to me, particularly because this analysis, like Kwon (2004), shows signs of the egalitarian, individualist society of the US, in contrast with the more hierarchical, collectivist Chinese society. I also believe her use of statistics sets a standard for future studies on refusals, since statistical data has the potential to remove the subjectivity and bias that can naturally arise when one is comparing his/her own language or culture with others.

A third study that has been useful to me in learning more about American refusals is Félix-Brasdefer (2003), which also compares three data sets—in this case, Latin Americans speaking Spanish, Americans speaking Spanish, and Americans speaking English. Not only is this study significant because it is one of the first to compare Latin American native Spanish speakers and American native English speakers with respect to declining an invitation, but also because it compares refusal differences across genders. In this study, the males were more direct than the females.

Félix-Brasdefer’s (2003) is the only study that I have seen that compares the two genders. It is also worth noting that the average age of participants in each sample was between 29 and 33 years old. This is significant because the results are more representative of a somewhat older population than Kwon (2004) and other studies, though the demographic is still quite narrow. However, one must also remember that his sample size is extremely small (five males and five females per sample, for a total of 30
participants), meaning the study is carried out from a qualitative rather than a quantitative perspective.

The two main objectives of the study are to examine 1) the politeness strategies (e.g., conveying a positive opinion, gratitude, etc.) used when declining the invitation of someone of higher, equal, and lower status (an employee to a boss, a friend to a friend, and a professor to a student, respectively); and 2) the degree of directness (i.e., direct refusal, indirect refusal, say nothing at all, etc.) used when declining an invitation of someone of each of the aforementioned status levels. Results indicate that the American English speakers were more direct in their refusals than the native Spanish speakers and the Americans learning Spanish, particularly toward someone of higher status, but also toward people of equal and lower status. During the retrospective verbal reports, native Spanish speaker participants indicated the importance of maintaining ‘face’ (i.e., not causing someone to feel uncomfortable in any way) when declining the invitation of someone of higher or lower status. These findings provide further support for the way to deal with face in Latin American cultures. Findings also affect my future interactions with international students from throughout the world, in that I must be sensitive to students from other countries as I perform any type of speech act.

Knowing these cultural differences will help me be more effective as I provide explicit pragmatic instruction to my students. Félix-Brasdefer recommends the use of “authentic videos, visits by [native speakers] to the [second language] classroom, role-play models of [native speakers] performing speech acts, etc.” (p. 247) to teach speech acts such as refusals, as well as devoting a section of the syllabus to teaching sociocultural information. These strategies can be applied in either a Spanish or an ESL
class.

One difference between Félix-Brasdefer’s (2003) study and the other studies outlined in this annotated bibliography is the procedure for data collection. Instead of a DCT, he employs “five simulated open-role play situations” (p. 230) with the help of two research assistants—a Peruvian native Spanish speaker (for the Spanish role-play) and an American native English speaker (for English). While one might use a DCT because of the relative ease of collecting data, as well as the control the researcher can have over the variables being studied, a valuable aspect of open role-play situations like those used in this study is the limitless variety of possible responses. This type of data collection can provide researchers with unexpected results, which can lead to greater insight for future studies.

While Félix-Brasdefer (2003), Kwon (2004), and Chang’s (2009) studies each compares refusals of two languages, Al-Kahtani (2005) compares three—Americans, Japanese, and Arabs. As do other researchers, Al-Kahtani studies refusals toward people of perceived higher, equal, and lower status. While the sample sizes are small (10 participants per language, for a total of 30), and the exact ages of participants are not supplied, a possible strength of this study is that not all participants are university undergraduate students. For example, several participants are studying for their master’s degree, others for their doctorate, one participant is a high school teacher, and another is a physician. Another strength of Al-Kahtani’s study is that he lays a good foundation for someone like me who has recently begun to study speech acts, by providing some of the history of speech act theory, from the research of John Austin and John Searle, beginning in 1962.
Some of the most important pedagogical implications of this study include the following: When refusing someone of higher status, the American participants first expressed regret (e.g., ‘I’m sorry’) followed by an excuse (e.g., ‘I have a previous commitment’). Likewise, when refusing an equal, they expressed positive opinion (e.g., ‘I’d love to’) and then an excuse. Lastly, when refusing someone of lower status, they expressed positive agreement (e.g., ‘That would be great’) followed by an excuse.

Not only do his results include the order of refusal utterances used by each sample group, but also the frequency of each semantic formula (i.e., the most commonly used refusal utterances). When refusing someone of a higher status, Americans used mainly two types of refusals, regret being the most common, followed by excuses. When refusing an equal, they used excuses the most often, followed by positive agreement, followed by pause fillers (e.g., ‘Um’) and negative willingness (e.g., ‘I can’t’). And when refusing someone of lower status, excuses were most common, followed by postponement (e.g., ‘Can we do it next week?’), positive agreement, negative willingness, and gratitude (e.g., ‘Thanks for the invitation’). While I include here only the American results, Al-Kahtani includes the same results for both Arabs and Japanese. All of these results can greatly aide in planning lessons for teaching refusals for not just invitations, but also requests, offers, and suggestions, as they provide examples that my students can use to pattern their refusal utterances.

Another cross-linguistic comparison is found in Wannaruk (2008), which compares Americans and Thais in refusals. In this study, Wannaruk studies the pragmatic transfer (i.e., the effect of skills used in one’s native language on his/her ability to accurately produce utterances in a different language) of Thai university EFL students.
Study participants total 120, including 40 Americans and 80 native Thai speakers, 40 of whom are studying EFL. The diverse backgrounds of the participants is also significant, since students were between 22 and 40 years of age, and “all of them were graduate students studying a variety of academic majors in different universities in their own countries” (p. 320), making the results of the study more representative of a larger demographic group.

Like other studies, Wannaruk (2008) employs a DCT to study refusals. Her results are important because they add to the data regarding the utterance order in which Americans (and Thais) decline an invitation. For example, she finds that Americans “usually began their refusals [to invitations] with ‘positive [opinion]’ followed by ‘explanation’” (p. 322), or ‘excuse’, as Al-Kahtani (2005) and others classify it. She also finds that Thais express regret and negative ability with their explanation, similar to Chang’s (2009) findings with Chinese. Gratitude is another difference between Americans and Thais, in that Americans expressed it more than Thais toward people of equal status.

The concept of face is also discussed in Wannaruk’s (2008) study, not only for Thais—which agrees with other research on Asian cultures (e.g., Al-Kahtani, 2005; Chang, 2009; Kwon, 2004)—but also for Americans. This contributes to the research on American refusals because it provides evidence that even in highly individualistic societies like the US, face-threatening speech acts must be explicitly taught to help language learners avoid giving or taking offense when someone declines their invitation or vice versa.
Finally, I conclude with Archer (2010), whose article is highly valuable to me in that she provides an example of a lesson plan to teach an ESL class the speech act of declining an invitation. In this empirical study, Archer grounds her work in Beebe et al. (1990) and combines her own research, contributing systematically to current research on refusals. Though the lesson itself was designed for university ESL students in an intensive English summer program, the lesson plan can easily be adapted to English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts as well, since it includes visual aids that teachers can easily develop on their own. Alternatively, they may watch Archer’s YouTube video.

Archer’s proposed lesson plan includes a warm-up phase, an introduction phase that includes a powerful visual-kinesthetic demonstration of the concept of ‘face’, and several learning activities in which students combine critical thinking with practice, as well as complete their own DCTs. The handouts Archer includes in the appendices make implementing her proposed lesson plan relatively easy, especially since she mentions possible adaptations for students with a basic through advanced level of proficiency. For an example of how I would include some of Archer’s (2010) ideas in a lesson plan for teaching how to decline an invitation, which I plan to use in the intermediate-level university ESL conversation class I currently teach, the reader may turn to my culture artifact.

In conclusion, each of the studies included in this section of my annotated bibliography is useful for second language teachers who want to teach pragmatics in their classroom. The studies give an overview of the effects of collectivistic and individualistic ideology on the reasons for which some cultures express refusals and other face-threatening acts differently depending on the perceived relative status of the person with
whom they interact. They also provide valuable advice about how to include the teaching of refusals and other speech acts in course syllabi. By gaining a better understanding of one’s culture through these studies and others, second language teachers can become more effective in their teaching of pragmatic concepts such as refusals, apologies, showing gratitude, or numerous others. Students studying a second language can also benefit through these studies by becoming more empathetic of people from different cultures, as well as avoiding embarrassing or awkward situations that arise from cultural misunderstandings. As mentioned, since refusals are one of the most face-threatening speech acts in any language, it is important that the teaching of refusals become an integral part of every second language curriculum.
Second Language Teaching

Of all the knowledge and skills I have gained through studying and teaching during my time in the MSLT program, the greatest has been the concept of what I believe to be effective second language teaching. The following sources have impacted my learning the most. Some of them give a broad overview of a variety of concepts within second language teaching, such as sociocultural perspectives on second language learning, while others focus more on a specific methodological approach (e.g., communicative language teaching).

During my first semester in the MSLT program, I took a class on theories and practices of second language teaching, in which the main text was Shrum and Glisan (2010). For me, this book has offered a solid introduction to many different aspects of second language teaching, including the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Standards and Guidelines, the historical trends in second language teaching—including the audiolingual method (ALM) and communicative language teaching (CLT) method, which I briefly compare in my apprenticeship of observation and my teaching philosophy—and a plethora of other concepts and ideas related to second language teaching.

While Shrum and Glisan (2010) include a wide variety of topics, the most important to me have been the concepts of input, output, and student interaction in language learning, as well as the integral role technology can play in the second language classroom. Since each of these topics now forms part of my teaching philosophy, I will explain Shrum and Glisan’s (2010) specific contributions. First, they distinguish between the concept of cognitive achievement—which calls for comprehensible input (Krashen,
1982), intake (e.g., Lee & VanPatten, 2003), and output (Swain, 1985) to acquire a language—and social achievement, which claims that learning is directly affected by one’s interaction with others (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978, which I discuss more in depth below). Another concept that Shrum and Glisan (2010) discuss is student motivation, which plays “an important but complex role in language learning and performance” (p. 34).

Lastly, Shrum and Glisan (2010) expound on the use of technology to enhance language acquisition and motivation. They describe computer-mediated communication (CMC), in both asynchronous (e.g., e-mail and online chat), and synchronous (e.g., Skype video calling) forms. Using CMC not only has the potential to increase student motivation, but can also expand language learning and teaching beyond the walls of the physical classroom by connecting students and teachers to authentic material and allowing them to communicate and interact with native speakers of the target language.

This high priority of communication and interaction is also emphasized by Ballman, Liskin-Gasparro, and Mandell (2001). The authors introduce CLT as a method that focuses on preparing students for real-life communication in the target language. To accomplish this goal, teachers who implement CLT provide their students with comprehensible input and utilize paired and group activities on a regular basis to give students as many opportunities as possible to use the language to communicate.

Ballman et al. (2001) contribute much to my views on second language teaching, not only because of their thorough introduction to CLT, but also because they debunk several myths of language teaching that many educators believe. For example, they explain that teachers do not need to speak the target language perfectly, nor expect their
students to do so, since errors are a natural part of the learning process. They also push for focusing on communication rather than merely ‘covering the material’.

This aspect of communication over coverage has been one of the greatest influences of Ballman et al. (2001) on my teaching philosophy. They point out that one must not question whether or not to teach grammar in the second language class, but rather teach the grammar necessary to complete the task-based activity (TBA). Task-based activity, as mentioned in my teaching philosophy, can consist of student-centered activities in which students work to complete a specific task (e.g., converse with airport personnel of the target language/culture regarding lost baggage). That is, teachers should plan their lessons around communicative goals with supporting grammar goals as a means for achieving the communicative goals.

While Ballman et al. (2001) provide an introduction to the CLT method of language teaching, Lee and VanPatten (2003) take second language teachers further down the CLT path, diving deeper into the process of incorporating it into the second language classroom. Lee and VanPatten point out some of the weaknesses of some traditional, non-CLT methods of teaching, particularly ALM that dominated foreign language classes for much of the 20th century and whose influence is still apparent in some classes today.

Specifically, they mention what has come to be known as ‘the Atlas Complex’, the role that many instructors (not only in second language teaching but in other disciplines as well) assume in their class. An instructor who assumes this role carries most of the weight of the teaching and learning experience on his/her shoulders, while students, as a result, become passive learners. In this type of second language classroom
atmosphere, the instructor controls all classroom utterances by dominating the discussion, occasionally calling on a student to provide a short answer before continuing on to the next point. The students are thus provided with few opportunities, if any, to use the language in a meaningful or communicative way.

Furthermore, Lee and VanPatten (2003) caution teachers to examine their use of drill-type activities in class. Although a communicative drill question might allow for more than one correct answer, it does not necessarily provide a real exchange since “once an answer is given, the learners simply move on to the next question” (p. 55). In contrast to this style of teaching, Ballman et al. (2001) and Lee and VanPatten (2003) emphasize comprehensible input on the teacher’s part. When input is comprehensible, it is easier for learners to process into intake and ultimately use to produce output themselves as they interact with each other in a communicative way during TBA. In short, Lee and VanPatten (2003) provide second language teachers with a valuable resource for improving student interaction and SLA through adherence to CLT methodology.

While Ballman et al. (2001) and Lee and VanPatten (2003) advocate high levels of student interaction in the second language classroom, Vygotsky (1978) provides teachers with a more in-depth understanding of the role of interaction in SLA. A Russian psychologist widely known for his work in sociocultural theory, Vygostky is considered one of the pioneers in exploring various SLA-related topics including mediation, regulation, and the ZPD.

Mediation, according to Vygotsky, is the process through which one interacts with one’s environment (both objects and other people) to complete a task. The concept of regulation is divided into three parts—object-, other-, and self-regulation. Since object-
regulation applies mostly to young children, I limit my discussion to the latter two. As mentioned in my teaching philosophy, language learners interact with others through ‘other-regulation’ (e.g., a language teacher or highly proficient student peer helps a less-proficient student to fill out an internship application for a foreign country online) until they (the learners) reach a point of being able to complete the task on their own, via ‘self-regulation’.

As a learner progresses through these stages of regulation, s/he also progresses along his/her personal ZPD, which is the difference between one’s current developmental level and the level at which one can perform with help (i.e., mediation) from a more able peer or teacher. Throughout the entire learning and developmental process, a person is continuously changing his/her identity, which is the sum total of a person’s culture, including one’s beliefs and ideals, abilities, way of thinking, and so on.

Vygotsky’s (1978) work in sociocultural theory has expanded my thinking about SLA and second language teaching. Most importantly, it has helped me grasp the notion that language is not learned in a vacuum, but through the use of authentic materials and interaction with people of the target language and culture. While CLT emphasizes the use of authentic material, some scholars, such as Magnan (2008) suggest that it does not take into account the importance of interaction with the target culture.

An extension of sociocultural theory and how it fills the possible gap left by CLT is provided by Magnan (2008), who claims that the concept of communicative competence (i.e., the ability to not only speak but communicate in a given language) “is realized only partially” in CLT methodology (p. 356), since it usually involves interaction among a group of language learners from the same native language and culture, making
the language learning experience less than authentic. She specifically mentions that the
tasks involved in teaching and learning culture in CLT are often dominated more by
“personal reaction” than “reflection” (p. 357), which generates egocentrism within
learners as they view other cultures through their monocultural lens.

To help bridge the gap between CLT’s limitations and communicative
competence in language learners, Magnan (2008) suggests seven changes teachers can
make in their second language teaching curricula. First, she recommends making
“authentic cultural documents … the impetus for learning” (p. 366). As mentioned in my
teaching philosophy and my language artifact, authentic texts can promote increased
student motivation and pragmatic competence.

The second idea is to “promote virtual communities” (p. 367) through
asynchronous and synchronous CMC. This can be as simple as pairing students with key
pals from the target culture. The third also promotes communities through utilizing
service opportunities with speakers of the target language, not just for practicing the
target language but also for making “cultural connections and confront[ing] identity
issues” (p. 368). This idea can also be applied through encouraging students to serve
regularly at a community resource center where they can interact face-to-face with
speakers of the target language. Magnan’s fourth idea is similar to the third, in that we
focus study abroad experiences “toward community building with members of the target
culture” (p. 369). Instead of isolating study abroad students from native speakers of the
target language (e.g., during sheltered language instruction in a language institute),
students should be given as much ‘hands-on’ experience interacting with members of the
target culture as possible.
Magnan’s final three recommendations address issues related to curricula and assessment. She encourages teachers to “enhance reflection on identity building” (p. 369) by incorporating personal reflection and readings that examine identity shifts and multilingualism and multiculturalism (i.e., reflecting more than one culture, such as the case when a person immigrates to a new country). Heightened student awareness of the concept of identity and multilingualism can provide a solid base for helping students develop pragmatic competence. Sixth, “develop interdisciplinary constellations of courses” (p. 370), such as a Spanish language course, a history course based on Latin American history, and an anthropology course. By doing so, students can develop a more complete understanding of both the linguistic and the cultural aspects of the target language. Lastly, Magnan encourages teachers to “monitor learning in a more individual manner than current testing provides” (p. 372), such as through student portfolios in which students themselves can monitor their linguistic and pragmatic competence and reflect on their identity development as they learn more about the target language and culture. By applying these seven principles in the second language classroom, teachers can go beyond the limitations of CLT and help students become effective language learners as they combine language with culture.

In summary, the aforementioned scholars have impacted my teaching philosophy in many ways, and helped me become a better language teacher. The principles they advocate can be applied to any language and any environment, both in foreign language (e.g., a Spanish class in the US) and second language teaching (e.g., a French class for immigrants in Paris) contexts. When applied in either of these contexts, these principles can help teachers not only improve student motivation to study and acquire the new
language, but can also increase students' communicative and sociocultural competence, thus enabling them to communicate effectively in the language being studied.
Authentic Texts

Before entering the MSLT program, I believed that it was important to teach students using authentic texts (i.e., texts produced by native or fluent speakers, for native or fluent speakers). However, it was not until I took a class on linguistic analysis that I realized that authentic texts include a variety of texts, such as poetry, short stories, newspaper articles, music, job applications, television (TV) commercials, and more. As I have studied in the MSLT program and applied what I have learned, my interest in authentic texts continues to grow. This section of the annotated bibliography focuses on a particular type of authentic text that I discuss in my language artifact, namely, TV commercials. The specific references I will discuss have increased my understanding of authentic texts and their numerous possible uses in the second language classroom, whether to increase student motivation to acquire the language, to teach a specific linguistic or cultural concept, or a variety of other reasons.

To begin, there has been considerable debate over the years regarding the extent to which authentic texts should be used in the second language classroom. Crossley et al. (2007) provide an overview of this debate on whether to use an authentic text in its purest form (i.e., without altering it all) or simplify the text in some way to make it more comprehensible for students, particularly those at the beginning levels of language study. The most popular rationale for utilizing only authentic texts is the idea that simplified texts may provide a distorted example of the target language and culture and may linguistically confuse or overwhelm language learners as a result of all the alterations to the text. Meanwhile, others contend that by using simplified texts, learners can be
introduced to the second language as they were to their first language, through simplified, comprehensible input.

In this exploratory study, Crossley et al. (2007) attempt to bridge the gap between these two conflicting ideas by investigating “the differences in linguistic structures between sampled simplified and authentic reading texts” (p. 16). Their sample data includes “105 texts … taken from seven beginning [ESL] textbooks” (p. 21), which they analyze using a computational tool, thus minimizing the potential bias that exists towards using authentic rather than simplified texts. In doing so, they provide a detailed, objective overview of the cases of using simplified texts and authentic texts. This overview has been the most influential for me with regards to my teaching philosophy and language artifact. Their findings indicate, among other things, that authentic texts “are possibly better at demonstrating cause-and-effect relationships and developing plot lines and themes than simplified texts” (p. 25), though authentic texts demonstrate less cohesion. In other words, the “helpful redundancy” (p. 26) that aids in vocabulary acquisition and comprehension is more apparent in simplified texts than authentic texts. However, while simplified texts display more high-frequency words than authentic texts, it may be more difficult for students to process the added information.

The practice of elaborating authentic texts is explored in greater detail by O’Donnell (2009), who claims that “authentic texts can be modified so as to increase comprehensibility without sacrificing L2 [second language] discourse features” (p. 513). In this study, O’Donnell measures the effect of textual elaboration (i.e., modifying an authentic text by adding to, rather than simplifying, the text) on the ability of 197 undergraduate, fourth-semester Spanish students to recall information from three short
literary passages. Each literary passage has two versions—a purely authentic, unchanged one, and a textually elaborated one—thus making a total of six texts. Each participant read two texts (i.e., two versions of one literary passage), then “were prompted to recall, in English, what they had just read,” after which they “were asked to translate into English 18 problematic words and phrases” that had appeared in the texts they read (p. 519).

O’Donnell’s (2009) results are important because they demonstrate a possible answer to the question of whether to use authentic texts in their original or modified form. In regards to accuracy rate in vocabulary recall, “the readers of the elaborated versions outperformed the readers of the unmodified versions” (p. 524), though they did not differ regarding text comprehension (i.e., understanding the text). Findings also suggest that through elaboration, the need for marginal glosses decreases while the amount of exposure to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) increases, helping language learners read completely in the target language (TL) without the need of a dictionary or other means of translation. While O’Donnell (2009) points out that there could be issues related to gaining permission from authors to modify their work—which can prove to be a difficult process indeed—I believe the use of elaborated texts can serve as a potential middle-ground compromise between authentic texts and simplified texts.

With these ideas in mind of the pros and cons of using authentic texts in their original form for second language teaching, I now turn to studies that advocate the use of technology-delivered authentic texts such as TV commercials and other video. One such study is by Tschirner (2001), in which he proposes seven hypotheses of second language
acquisition (SLA), as well as the way in which technology-delivered authentic texts can help language teachers and learners achieve the implied goals of those hypotheses.

The first hypothesis is that learning is situated, meaning the knowledge one acquires should be learned in a similar environment to the one in which the knowledge will be used. Tschirner (2001) explains that the use of digital video in the foreign language (FL) classroom can expose learners to the environment in which they would use the language to communicate with members of the target culture. Tschirner’s second hypothesis is similar to the first, in that input from the target language—an indispensable component of SLA (Krashen, 1982)—can be enhanced through authentic audiovisual material. As stated in my teaching philosophy, I believe it is important for language learners to not only receive input but also produce output to successfully acquire the language. Tschirner’s (2001) third hypothesis agrees, and suggests the use of digital video to provide authentic modeling for students to aid them in the transition process between receiving input and producing output.

Fourth, Tschirner (2001) emphasizes the need to teach culture and pragmatics (i.e., speech acts such as an apologizing or giving advice) in the FL classroom. Authentic texts such as TV commercials can be a valuable source to fulfill this hypothesis. The countless video clips a teacher can provide his/her students as examples of culture and pragmatics can also be utilized to help students focus on form (e.g., pronunciation), according to Tschirner’s fifth hypothesis, and lexical differences (i.e., vocabulary words and phrases), as stated in Tschirner’s sixth. I agree that authentic texts in video format can be a powerful tool for providing students with real-life examples of the words, phrases, culture, and other aspects of the TL as it is used in communication. Finally,
Tschirner’s (2001) seventh hypothesis postulates that technology-delivered materials can help improve student motivation and lower their anxiety toward using and acquiring the TL. Each of these hypotheses is well represented in my teaching philosophy and language artifact, and can contribute much to FL teaching.

As Tschirner (2001) presents the reasoning behind incorporating technology-delivered materials into the FL classroom, Chen and Oller (2005) provide three criteria for choosing exactly which of these materials to use. The first criterion follows Tschirner’s (2001) first and second hypotheses, in that the language presented in the video clip should be an effective model of high-frequency uses of the words and phrases currently being explored in the FL class.

The second and third criteria agree with Tschirner’s (2001) seventh hypothesis regarding student motivation and anxiety toward using the TL, in that the material (i.e., the content, story-line, and social interactions) presented in the video and other authentic texts should be “appropriate to the interests, age-level, and life experience of the learners” (Chen & Oller, 2005, p. 267). I have seen several examples of language teachers using a video clip that is not suitable for their particular group of learners, such as a children’s video displayed in an adult education class, which may leave the students feeling less intelligent and inferior, thus possibly increasing their anxiety toward learning the language or leading to disengagement.

Another contribution to FL teaching that Chen and Oller’s (2005) make is their advocating the use of sound motion pictures (SMPs)—“feature films, television programs, and other types of authentic videos” (p. 264)—not only as supplementary materials but as an integral part of foreign language instruction. Magnan (2008) also
agrees, since without an authentic environment in which to use the language being studied, language learners cannot fully develop the cultural aspects necessary for communicative competence. While it may not be possible to completely immerse students in the target culture, the authenticity provided by SMPs and other technology-delivered materials can provide a more authentic cultural experience than otherwise possible within a FL classroom.

Though the idea that authentic texts take on a more central focus of FL curricula can be daunting for some FL teachers, Etienne and Vanbaelen (2006) provide a practical example for how to do so in beginner- or intermediate-level class, with a three-step approach to literary analysis through TV commercials. In this study, Etienne and Vanbaelen apply the three steps—impressions, descriptions, and interpretations—first to a TV commercial and then to a short literary text.

The first stage of their approach, impressions, entails displaying a TV commercial with the sound muted, and allowing students to write down the first three words that come to their minds. After these words are compiled and grouped on the board, student pairs or groups should then use the words to write a possible script for the silent commercial, before finally viewing the commercial with sound and reacting to the similarities and differences between what was expected and the actual script. The second stage, description, involves a detailed analysis of the commercial regarding the visual, audio, technical, and linguistic components presented, with each group of students being assigned to give a brief presentation on one of the components. Then in the third stage, interpretations, those same groups attempt to make connections between their impressions of the commercial and the given component they analyzed.
This three-stage process is then applied to a short literary text, during which students complete similar steps to the ones they have recently completed during the commercial analysis. Etienne and Vanbaelen (2006) point out that there is currently a gap between the communication-focused lower levels of FL classes and the literature-focused upper-levels, and that this type of TV commercial and literary analysis can help bridge the gap. Their study also follows what Magnan (2008) and Chen and Oller (2005) emphasize, which is the need to incorporate authentic texts as an integral part of the FL curriculum. This type of analysis can be applied repetitively, with a different focus, TV commercial, and literary text every time, thus maintaining a high student motivation toward the TL while deepening their understanding of the target culture.

Each of the aforementioned authors has had an impact on my understanding of the importance of using authentic texts in my class. Through them, I have become more aware of the increasingly numerous possibilities available to FL teachers through advancements in technology. I have begun to incorporate these practices in my ESL and Spanish classes and have seen the increased student motivation and interest in the TL that these authors claim.
LOOKING FORWARD

Upon graduating from the MSLT program at USU, my original career goals were to teach ESL to international students in tertiary education. However, as a current DLI teacher in elementary education, I am also developing a love for teaching younger learners, as well. Regardless of the long-term career I pursue, I also want to continue to develop my foreign language teaching abilities, which I plan to accomplish through regular, short-term ESL teaching programs outside of the US, beginning in China. By being immersed in the Chinese language and culture, as well as other languages and cultures, I can develop not only my language proficiency but also my pragmatic competence (i.e., cultural understanding), which will aid me in my teaching, whether it be in university teaching—in which my ESL students represent many nationalities—or in elementary teaching, in which the student population is composed mainly of native English and native Spanish speakers.

As I continue to teach ESL and Spanish, I look forward to serving on committees for curriculum development. As a teacher of both languages, I have been exposed to some effective textbooks and other teaching materials, as well as several that did not appear very authentic and engaging, and thus were not conducive to SLA. Through my ongoing experience in second language teaching, I want to help improve the overall quality of my respective language teaching program through improving the curriculum and the texts that teachers use.

I also plan to continue to develop my understanding of teaching culture and the use of technology in the FL classroom, through study and contributing to the ESL and foreign language teaching field, such as TESOL International Association and the Utah
Foreign Languages Association. So far, my attendance and participation in these associations and others has provided me with many resources to improve my teaching abilities.
REFERENCES


Ballman, T. L. (1998). From teacher-centered to learner-centered: Guidelines for sequencing and presenting the elements of a foreign language class. In J. Harper,
M. Lively, & M. Williams (Eds.), *The coming of age of the profession: Issues and emerging ideas for the teaching of foreign languages* (pp. 97–111). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.


Appendix A

Lesson Plan for Analysis and Reflection of Teaching Video

Objective: Students will tell about their favorite vacation ever—when it was, what they did, why it’s their favorite.

Grammar/Vocab: Los pasatiempos, el pretérito; review ser/estar, presente prog.

Materials: Print out of: 1) 3 cerditos 2) Firma aquí: 24 horas 3) Entrevista: Peor cita

Lesson Outline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle of Instruction</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time (min)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House keeping</td>
<td>IDEA evaluations next week</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm up</td>
<td>TODOs: Simón dice (do for 1 min)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grupos de 4, un voluntario de cada grupo: (Tóquense el/la..)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>Review Test</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Introduce objective</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Los pasatiempos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive feedback</td>
<td>Compañeros: Tu pasatiempo o deporte favorito (see 6.25 ¡Adivina! for directions)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(opcional) TODOs: Repeat activity. Person who gets the most people to guess their favorite sport/pastime wins.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>Reading activity to introduce preterite:</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.pequelandia.org/cuentos/famosos/3cerditos/">http://www.pequelandia.org/cuentos/famosos/3cerditos/</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compañeros: Read the 2nd paragraph of “3 Cerditos”, underline words you don’t know, identify the main ideas and characters (who, what, when, where)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Pretérito—yo and tú</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive feedback</td>
<td>TODOs: Firma aquí</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correct errors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Pretérito—usted/él/ella, nosotros y ustedes/ellos</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive feedback</td>
<td>Compañeros: Entrevista: La peor cita de tu vida</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correct errors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Las mejores vacaciones de tu vida</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuos:</td>
<td>Piensen en las mejores vacaciones de su vida.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Escriban cuándo fueron, adónde fueron, qué hicieron y con quién</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compañeros: Comparen sus vacaciones. Encuentren una cosa</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td><strong>Individuos:</strong> Escriban tres oraciones para describir las mejores vacaciones de su compañero.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Questionnaire in English and Spanish

For ELLs (with Spanish translation):

1. What types of services would you consider ‘language services’? ¿Qué tipos de servicios consideraría ‘servicios de idioma’?

2. What language services are you aware of in Cache County? ¿Qué servicios de idioma conoces en el condado de Cache?

3. Of these services, which ones have you used, and to what extent? De estos servicios, ¿cuáles ha utilizado, y hasta qué punto?

4. What improvements could be made to better meet your English language goals? ¿Cómo se podrían mejorar estos servicios a fin de servirle mejor a usted?

5. Which services would you like to use, but cannot? ¿Qué servicios le gustaría utilizar, pero no puede?

6. What inhibits you from using language services? ¿Qué le impide utilizar estos servicios de idioma?

For language service providers:

1. Based on the definition we provided, what language services do you offer to ELLs in the county?

2. Does your institution charge money for language services? If so, how much money?

3. Does the program track attendance?

4. How often and to what extent do ELLs use these services?

5. What days and times are the language services offered?
6. What do you think could be done to improve use of language services by:

   a. an increased number of ELLs attending?

   b. an increased rate of attendance?
Appendix C

Sample discourse completion test (DCT) (Adapted from Kwon, 2004, pp. 360–362)

Please read the following 12 situations. After each situation you will be asked to write a response in the blank after ‘You’.

1. You are the president of a big printing company. A sales representative from a printing machine company invites you to one of the most expensive restaurants, Lutece, in New York.

   Sales representative: We have met several times now, and I’m hoping you will buy my company’s printing machine. Would you like to have dinner with me at Lutece to sign the contract?

   You:

   Sales representative: Well … maybe we can meet another time.

2. You are an executive at a very large software company. One day the boss calls you into his office.

   Boss: Next Sunday my partner and I are having a little party at my house. I know it’s sudden … but I’m hoping all my executives will be there with their partners. Will you come to the party?

   You:

   Boss: Well, that’s too bad … I was hoping everyone would be there. …

3. A friend invites you to dinner, but you really don’t like this friend’s partner.

   Friend: How about coming to my house Sunday night? We’re having a small dinner party.

   You:
Friend: Well … maybe next time.
Appendix D

Example lesson plan for teaching declining an invitation

**Objective:** Students will be able to decline an invitation from someone of perceived higher, equal, or lower status.

**Lesson Outline:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle of Instruction</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time (min)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction/ Warm up</td>
<td>Teacher demonstration: Invite several students to a non-mandatory class meeting this Saturday at 7 am. Record students’ refusals on board (Archer, 2010). Introduce typical use of declining an invitation (Saito &amp; Beecken, 1997).</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Teacher demonstration: Using “refusal softeners” to save face when declining an invitation (Archer, 2010, p. 184).</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td><strong>Video clip:</strong> Display one or two short clips in which a AE declines someone’s invitation. Students discuss how the person refused and how the inviter reacted to the refusal.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive feedback</td>
<td><strong>Pairs or small groups:</strong> Refusal sequence activity (Archer, 2010): Students use color-coded responses (representing gratitude, pause-fillers, future promises, etc) to design a conversation in which someone is invited but declines the invitation. <strong>Group/class discussion:</strong> Share conversations, teacher offers feedback/advice. <strong>Pairs:</strong> Design two DCTs: 1. Distribute 3X5 cards and have student pairs write a scenario in which someone needs to apologize (decline an invitation, etc.) (Archer, 2010) 2. Then have them rotate cards and write how they would respond. <strong>Class discussion:</strong> Student pairs share their answers, teacher offers feedback/advice.</td>
<td>5–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td><strong>Role play:</strong> Groups of 3: Student 1 invites, student 2 declines, student 3 observes and records refusal strategies that student 2 uses to decline. <strong>Discuss:</strong> Student 3 shares what s/he noticed. <strong>Rotate, repeat activity twice more</strong> (each student gets one opportunity in each role).</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrap up</td>
<td><strong>Group or whole-class discussion:</strong> What went well. What questions do you still have? Should we dedicate more time next class?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>