Dialog on Language Instruction

Faculty Forum

When Faculty Become Learners: Faculty Perceptions of Navajo Vocabulary Instruction

Roger Anderson, PhD
French Instructor, Multi-Language School, Undergraduate Education

Prompted by learner feedback and by my own difficulties learning vocabulary in other languages, I reviewed the scholarship on vocabulary acquisition. On Indigenous People's Day 2024, I presented five individual lessons in which faculty/ staff in attendance became learners of the Navajo language. Each lesson was designed with a unique set of target vocabulary and allowed attendees to experience different methods of vocabulary instruction. Secondarily, to gain an understanding of their preferences, I distributed a feedback sheet on which participants rated their retention of the targeted vocabulary following each lesson and other comments they wished to report. Reviewing this data revealed faculty found the method requiring use of the English-Navajo dictionary to be slightly more effective than other methods, while the method utilizing participants' induction from "e-realia" was overwhelmingly viewed the most positively. Findings of this modest project suggest that effectiveness at retention and enjoyment may be orthogonal, but both may be important for DLIFLC learners. This project afforded faculty an opportunity in experiential learning, which may inspire instructors to vary their methods of vocabulary instruction. Moreover, positioning faculty as learners, however briefly, may enhance instructors' empathy for their learners.

Keywords: *Vocabulary Acquisition, Second Language Acquisition, Teacher Education, Experiential Learning*

INTRODUCTION

The DLIFLC Faculty held a professional development day in October that coincided with Indigenous People's Day/Columbus Day. As an instructor of French, I presented a 50-minute

lesson on vocabulary acquisition to attendees from the Multi-Language School. I selected this topic because French learners' feedback on the End of Semester Questionnaires (ESQs) in Spring 2024 had refocused my attention on the mechanics of vocabulary instruction. Multiple learners viewed their vocabulary acquisition as a problem area. One student wrote:

> *We are not given vocabulary for the following day's lesson and as a result, we spend hours listening to drills that are not comprehensible input. It seems like most other language programs have a robust vocabulary learning methodology. … We do not revisit the vocabulary learned in listening drills and it is difficult to retain whatever new vocabulary we have learned.*

This view reflects a general trend within language teaching in which vocabulary is assumed to happen gradually, needing little in the way of pedagogical intervention. Only in the 2010's did scholars note, "in recent years, vocabulary has been considered to play a more central role in second language learning than was traditionally assumed" (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 179). I found myself empathizing with the student's views, rooted in my extracurricular language studies of Mandarin, Farsi, and Spanish. To sensitize faculty to the challenges learners face in acquiring vocabulary, I provided attendees of my presentation the opportunity to become learners of the Navajo language, albeit within a short timeframe. I presented five sets of vocabulary using five methods that included or excluded various aspects of vocabulary instruction that align with recent research findings in cognitive linguistics. Concurrently, I conducted a simple poll to collect faculty's opinions on each method. I later reviewed this feedback and presented the findings and implications for vocabulary instruction across the DLIFLC.

Identifying and Teaching an Unfamiliar Language to Faculty

The Navajo language (*Diné Bizaad*) is the most spoken indigenous language in the United States today. Estimates of speakers range between approximately 120,000 (Endangered Language Project, 2024) to 167,000 (Eberhard et. al., 2021). Because the language is seen by some as endangered, others within the Navajo community are reluctant to recognize its vulnerability (Hozien, 2024). The Navajo language has a singular place within U.S. military history—having served as an impenetrable code for American military personnel[1] during World War II (Library of Congress, 2024). When introducing Navajo, I informally polled attendees and found that all but two had no ancestral connection to American Indians[2]. None of the attendees claimed any Navajo proficiency. This meant that all learners would be equally unfamiliar with the target vocabulary items I used during the lessons.

[1] This article is dedicated to the memory of John Kinsel, Sr. and his fellow Code-Talkers, who lent their language, culture, and bravery to the United States during World War II, despite enduring the inequities of American society of that era.

[2] I use the term American Indian in accordance with prescriptions of the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian, 2024).

Author's Positionalities

I am not an American of indigenous ancestry, but I support educational efforts to promote American Indian culture through my travels and writing (Anderson, 2023a; Anderson, 2023b). I grew up along Lake Erie in Ohio, a state in which place names commonly reflect indigenous heritage. This instilled in me a curiosity for the peoples and cultures indigenous to North America. Having no connection to Navajo culture or language, I lacked expertise in this language. After my presentation, one written comment that I received pointed out my mispronunciation of Navajo. This comment likely came from an erudite language learner who had researched Navajo phonetics during my presentation. Nonetheless, this comment offers the opportunity to acknowledge my identities and linguistic privileges and apologize if the lesson offended.

My objectives for this presentation were to provide an experiential learning opportunity for DLIFLC faculty in which they would be exposed to various methods of vocabulary instruction. Such exposure would hopefully spark critical reflection on their vocabulary instruction practices.

Falling on Indigenous People's Day, I also hoped this presentation using the Navajo language would modestly raise participants' awareness of the legacy and continued presence of American Indians in California and the U.S. generally. To this end, I started the presentation by asking participants for the names of the peoples who called Monterey and California home before us. There was no response beyond "American Indians." I then led a short activity identifying the indigenous peoples of Monterey Bay and of California and I shared some resources for participants' extracurricular exploration of American Indian cultures.

Indeed, I could have designed such activities using Esperanto (an artificial language constructed in 1887), which would likely have been as equally unfamiliar among the attendees. In some ways, using an invented language with no native speakers would have simplified the complexities that accompany cultural and linguistic contacts, particularly between historically marginalized peoples and cultures and the language and culture that marginalized them. However, doing so would have squandered teachable moments like those described above.

My Pedagogical Lodestars for Vocabulary Instruction

Every instructor has ideologies and principles that knowingly or unknowingly inform their behavior in the classroom. As a language learner, instructor, and applied linguist, I recognize the complexity of learning a new language (L2). Understanding this complexity requires a transdisciplinary approach (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Although my research interests generally lie in socio-cultural issues of second language acquisition (SLA), I value the contributions to SLA made by cognitive linguistics. Three such works that inform my understanding of vocabulary acquisition are Barcroft's (2012) *Input-Based Incremental Vocabulary Instruction (IBIVI)*, Gibson et al.'s (2020) *Learning that Sticks: A Brain-Based Model for K-12 Instructional Design and Delivery*, and Wong et al.'s (2020) *Liaisons*, a textbook series for elementary French learners that implements Barcroft's IBIVI principles.

Taking each in turn, *Learning that Sticks* is a readable book designed for educators that brings together findings of cognitive research on learning generally—not specific to language learning. From them, it enumerates actions that classroom teachers can implement within their pedagogy. The book centers on the notion that forgetting is a natural, healthy process, and that different techniques can help slow forgetting and enhance learners' retention. Another slim volume intended for educators, Barcroft's (2012) *IBIVI*, provides strategies for teaching vocabulary in ways that align with findings of research into input processing (within cognitive linguistics). Key principles in IBIVI include encouraging implicit and explicit vocabulary teaching, stressing the importance of input, and limiting semantic output during the early stages of acquisition (Barcroft, 2012).

One textbook that utilized Barcroft's IBIVI principles is *Liaisons,* for undergraduate learners of French. I used it successfully as a French instructor for four years at two public institutions in the Midwest. Beyond its embrace of Input-Based Incremental Vocabulary Instruction, its grammar and vocabulary lessons, which alternate in each chapter, are contextualized within the plotline of a short film produced by the publishers. Such contextualization aligns with ACTFL's guiding principles for language learning (ACTFL, 2024). Furthermore, the focus of its exercises alternates from the film to learners' own lives and preferences, which are to be exchanged with classmates, aligning with communicative language teaching (Brigham Young University, 2024). *Liaisons* offers abundant, diversified input, and sequences learners' exposure to input prior to output (production). These elements rendered the textbook effective in facilitating learners' French acquisition.

EXPOSING FACULTY TO VARIOUS METHODS OF VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

This presentation/article aims to expose faculty to different methods and aspects of vocabulary teaching. Each method aligned, or intentionally misaligned, with theories or research findings from cognitive linguistics, which will be explained in turn within the following section. Each lesson involved a different set of five Navajo words or phrases (hereafter, "tokens"). Tokens were selected in part from the design of each lesson and on their presence within available, free, online tools. Admittedly, my unfamiliarity with Navajo guided the selection as well. I avoided selecting only singular words but opted to include expressions, which reflects the diversity of vocabulary acquisition our learners must undertake. Many expressions across languages must be learned as vocabulary—more so than as a grammatical construction—since they may communicate a message that does not reflect the sum of their constituent words (e.g., Mandarin: "have you eaten?" and Levantine Arabic: "What's your color?", both meaning "How are you?"). See Appendix A for the complete list of tokens. For each set of tokens, I prepared slides and projected them for participants. Each lesson provided an example of what participants were expected to do or produce.

Collecting Feedback

To understand participants' perspectives of each method, I distributed a printed feedback sheet that participants completed anonymously. It contained one Likert scale question to evaluate their retention of each lesson's tokens, ranging from 0 (no retention) to 5 (good retention). After each question was a section for comments in which I instructed participants to offer any thoughts, feelings, or comments on each specific lesson. Following each lesson, I provided 1–2 minutes during which participants (n=18) completed this self-assessment, which I collected at the end of the presentation. I also provided separate sheets of blank paper on which participants could complete each vocabulary lesson. Participants were actively engaged and seemed to enjoy the opportunity to be language learners. If designed as an empirical, psycholinguistic experiment, more control would have been implemented regarding sampling of participants, selection of tokens, consistency of difficulty, etc. The simple self-reported polling I conducted provided only a modest dataset of participants' perspectives on vocabulary instruction. Future studies could further explore vocabulary acquisition using more robust research methods under the leadership of researchers with more expertise in quantitative design.

Five Distinct Lessons: Design and Implementation

Each of the five lessons is intended to teach participants new Navajo tokens. The design of each lesson will be described here, with participants' responses described in a subsequent section. In the first lesson, participants were shown five tokens and a link to an online English-Navajo dictionary. No title or context was given. They were instructed to find the meaning of each token using the dictionary, then to create a sentence using the token. Because we lacked proficiency in Navajo, participants could only embed each Navajo token within an English sentence. For example, if the token was "tooh," which means "river," participants wrote a sentence like, "The Mississippi is the longest *tooh* in the U.S." Blending English and Navajo was imperfect, but successfully simulated the experience of learning new, unfamiliar vocabulary and integrating it into the language they already possessed and could easily deploy. See Figure 1.

Figure 1

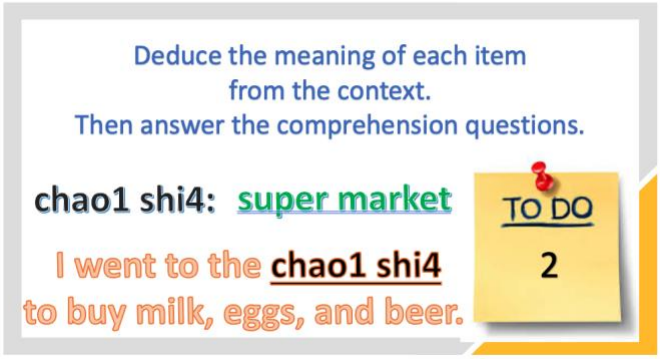
Lesson 1 Presented Decontextualized Items, Requiring Participants' Semantic Elaboration and Use of a Dictionary

Pedagogically, the first lesson sought to facilitate participants' experience of a commonly used method of vocabulary instruction—semantic elaboration. In other words, learners embed the token within their content. While instructors may perceive such a method as facilitating learners' transfer, or application of learning into novel contexts (Parker et al., 2020), research cautions against it. According to IBIVI's principles, semantic elaboration should be limited during initial stages. Barcroft (2012) found that such elaboration has a strong, negative effect on vocabulary learning because it obstructs learning of the token's form. Semantic elaboration may be useful in vocabulary acquisition, but not during initial stages (p. 38). Secondly, Lesson 1's lack of a title, which would represent a modicum of context, also violated the principle that vocabulary instruction provides contextualization of the learning (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). Researchers have concluded that learning sticks when goals are clearly explicated (Gibson et al., 2020).

For the second lesson, participants were not given tokens but rather a dialog entitled "At Home." Five tokens had been inserted and underlined within it. See Figure 2. Participants were instructed to infer the meaning of each token. Before reading the dialog, participants were shown five multiple-choice questions (MCQs) that ranged from Inter-Agency Language Roundtable (ILR) levels 1–3 and instructed to prepare to answer them during the reading. Next, three participants read the dialog aloud. We then answered the MCQs and verified the English meaning of each token.

Figure 2

Lesson 2 Presented Contextualized Items, Requiring Participants to Deduce Meaning from a Dialog



Pedagogically, Lesson 2 embedded the tokens within a context, the extraction of which required induction. Inductive teaching requires learners to discover for themselves the pattern or meaning, in contradistinction to deductive teaching, in which it is given to them (British Council, 2024). The tokens underlined within the dialog align with the principle of explicit vocabulary teaching by enhancing the tokens (Barcroft, 2012). Some tokens were repeated in the dialog, which nonetheless insufficiently reflected the IVIBI principle that new words be utilized frequently and repeatedly within meaning-oriented input (Barcroft, 2012, p. 19). Tokens were not grouped semantically (e.g., expressions of emotion, colors, animals). Research has found that semantically grouped items are learned less effectively than those thematically-grouped (e.g.

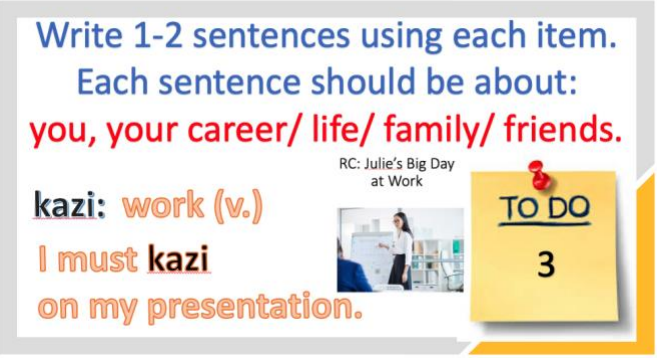
frog, green, pond, water, swim) (Barcroft, 2012). Notwithstanding, I wanted participants to experience encountering both easily-inferable and less-easily-inferable tokens, so I wrote the dialog to include both. In doing so, participants could learn experientially the importance of the IBIVI principle that, "if input is largely incomprehensible, a learner is less likely to infer the meaning of a new word as compared to input that is completely comprehensible" (Barcroft, 2024, p. 24–25).

Moreover, that MCQs were assigned before the reading could constitute a sort of goal-set to guide learners through the activity, which has been identified as facilitative of learning that sticks (Gibson et al., 2020). The MCQs were designed using my knowledge of formulating such questions, which I gained in a Faculty Development workshop on the topic. Most of the questions only required participants to retrieve information, while two questions required that participants infer. These tasks correspond to ILR levels 2 and 3, respectively. In completing a reading with MCQs, participants experienced a simulation of what DLI students experience when taking the DLTP, which is similarly text-based (aural/written) with an accompanying set of MCQs.

In the third lesson, participants were informed that this lesson's tokens would be needed for a reading comprehension text entitled, "Julie's Big Day at Work," represented by the image of a woman in a business setting. See Figure 3

Figure 3

Lesson 3 Presented Items in a Context with their Meanings Explicitly Given, Tasking Participants with Writing Personalized Sentences Using Each Token



Next, the five tokens were displayed alongside their English equivalents (see Figure 4). Participants were then asked to write a sentence that pertained to their life using each token. Research has found that making connections to prior learning or one's experiences facilitates retention (Gibson et al., 2020). Participants then shared orally their example sentences.

Figure 4
Lesson 3's Tokens: Meanings Were Explicitly Provided to Participants

RC: "Julie's big day at work"

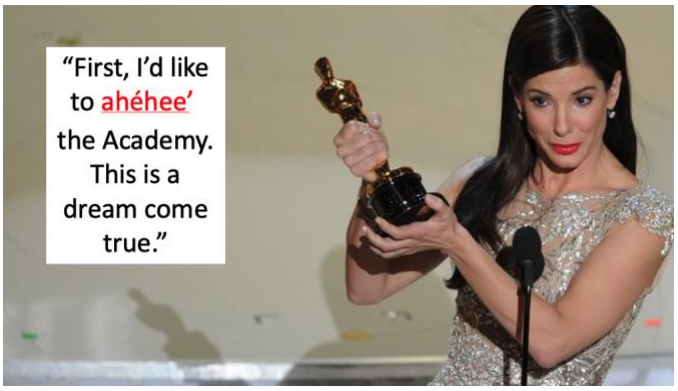
English	Navajo
I don't believe it	dooda sha'shin
I hate you.	nijooshłaah
good morning	yá'át'ééh abíní
I forgot	Beisénah
I love you	yóó'ánííníshʼní

Pedagogically, Lesson 3 provided a very modest context. Like Lesson 2, it required participants' semantic elaboration. In this way learning became connected to their own lives, which is recommended if learning is to stick (Gibson, 2020). Nevertheless, as with Lesson 2, Barcroft (2012) advised against such semantic elaboration during the early stages of learning new tokens (Gibson et al., 2020). While Lesson 3 constituted explicit vocabulary instruction, which is supported by research (Barcroft, 2012), it was void of images, which research has also found to be supportive of learning (Gibson et al., 2020).

The fourth lesson took the most time to design. In it, participants were instructed to use the images displayed to induce the meaning of each word, then complete the activity. For each of the five tokens, I showed four images I collected from the internet and then modified. These images may include signs, memes, film posters, magazine covers, screenshots of news sites headlines, etc. Because of our collective unfamiliarity with (any) Navajo, I had to modify these images, using images in English then overlaying or embedding the Navajo tokens within it. For example, for the token *ahéhee* ("to thank"), I used the image of a famous Hollywood actress giving her acceptance speech after winning an Academy Award. I overlaid the word *ahéhee* atop "thank you," with the rest of her English speech visible (see Figure 5). Pedagogically, these images, despite inauthentic code-mixing, succeeded in simulating the moment when learners encounter an unfamiliar word within the target language.

Such inauthenticity resulted from our (the participants' and mine) collective lack of proficiency in the Navajo language. Facilitating these lessons in Navajo fulfilled the two objectives that I had for this training: 1) to create opportunities for faculty to experience vocabulary instruction through various methods—which required the selection of a language with which no UML faculty was familiar and 2) to honor Indigenous People's Day and potentially enhance faculty's awareness of the importance and intricacy of native cultures. As mentioned previously, the Navajo language holds a cherished place within U.S. military history.

Figure 5
A Sample of E-Realia Presenting A Navajo Token (Meaning "Thank You") Within an English Sentence to Simulate Encountering a Novel L2 Word; This Token's Meaning Was More Easily Deducible by Participants



Such modifications and codemixing are not necessary when I design similar lessons for my French learners. I can locate authentic images from the internet that were created in French, by/for French speakers, that feature a specific French token. I would only select e-realia that includes familiar, comprehensible vocabulary and grammar that surround the French token.

Within this Navajo lesson, I displayed the four images using the word "to thank" consecutively, but intentionally manipulated the images and the order of their presentation. For example, if I wanted to increase the difficulty of learners' deduction of "thank you," I would first show Figure 6, in which the meaning of the token is much more ambiguous than in Figure 5's image of a thankful actress.

Figure 6
A Sample of E-Realia Presenting a Token (That Means "Thank You") Whose Meaning is Less Easily Deduced by Participants

Pedagogically, these images are *realia*, or authentic materials created by and for native speakers/ target community members, which have been used within U.S. foreign language classrooms for

almost a century (Pfeffer, 1937). This internet-based realia can be called "virtual realia" or « e-realia ». I hoped to facilitate for attendees the experience of inferring tokens' meaning from easy and enjoyable examples, but also difficult, unsettling examples. I did this to convey to faculty that, 1) attentiveness is needed when selecting e-realia for learners, and 2) a single image may not be sufficient, or even misleading, when inferring a token's meaning. To do so, I ordered harder, more ambiguous images before easier, less ambiguous images, which violates IBIVI's principle that activities progress from less to more demanding activities (Barcroft, 2012, p. 38).

This lesson enacts many points identified in cognitive science as facilitative of retention. If learning is to stick, researchers urge that images and realia be used to reinforce vocabulary learning (Barcroft, 2012). Moreover, the use of images reinforces the connection between the token and the concept (Gibson et al., 2020). While no overarching contextualization was present, one could argue that each image provided its form of context. Each set of images offered a gamification aspect to this lesson, piquing participants' curiosity and requiring their engagement. Exploiting curiosity is a tool of instructors that facilitates learning that sticks (Gibson et al., 2020). The lesson also sought to avoid student boredom, which can develop in the language classroom from a dearth of stimuli (Larson & Richards, 1991).

For the fifth lesson, participants were instructed that the tokens would eventually be used in a listening passage called "Beach Party!" Participants viewed the displayed image and listened to the token being spoken (by me). Then, the written form of the token appeared on the screen. Next, participants were to repeat the token aloud, then write it on their paper. Figure 7 shows the example, in which participants viewed the image of a wave, heard me speak the word "onda," then viewed the written word "onda" on the screen. They then repeated it chorally, then wrote it themselves.

Figure 7

Lesson 5 Presented Items in a Context, Gradually Focusing Participants' Attention on Tokens' Meaning, Pronunciation, and Spelling

This process was repeated for each token. Figure 8 provides an example token from Lesson 5.

Figure 8

Sample Token from Lesson 5: Participants Saw the Images, Then Heard the Token, Then Saw the Token

Pedagogically, this contextualized lesson offers the advantages of using images (Gibson et al., 2020), but more importantly follows IBIVI's principles of allowing learners' cognition to focus exclusively on mapping a token's concept ("hello") with its phonetic and orthographic forms (Barcroft, 2012, p. 29). What's more, it follows IBIVI's prohibition on copying or repeating tokens without having access to their meaning (Barcroft, 2012). Finally, the lesson also benefitted from the brain's attention to novelty, which only follows emotion within the order of phenomena to which our brains attend (Gibson et al., 2020). Creativity, the twin sister of novelty, has also been found to be generative of SLA (Jones & Richards, 2016).

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Participants' reactions to each of the five lessons were measured in the form of written feedback they provided via the questionnaire provided. Feedback from participants (n=18) on each lesson is shown in Table 1. Both the frequency and averages of Likert scores are displayed. In addition to scoring their retention, participants were asked to write any comments on each lesson. Most lessons among most participants went unremarked upon. Nonetheless, comments were coded as positive or negative about the lesson's method, or as unrelated to the method. This third code was attributed to comments describing the length or character of the tokens (e.g., "easiest due to concrete terms"). Conversely, self-descriptions were counted within the lesson's method (e.g., "I'm good at memorizing words" or "I'm bad at this"), interpreting the lesson as making the participant feel that way. An overall net score was calculated to assess the nature of the aggregated comments. Unrelated comments were excluded from this calculation.

Table 1
Results of Participant Feedback on Each Lesson (0=no retention, 5=good retention)

Lesson	Avg	0	1	2	3	4	5	Pos. Comm.	Neg. Comm.	N/A Comm.	Net Comm.
1	2.38	2	4	1	7	4	0	8	4	2	+4
2	1.44	4	5	7	1	1	0	3	9	1	-6
3	1.27	6	4	5	3	0	0	3	8	2	-5
4	2.16	1	5	5	3	3	1	12	0	2	+12
5	1.65*	3	5	5	1	2	0	5	5	1	0

*In calculating this average: one participant selected both 1 and 2. I opted to count the higher. Second, only 16 out of 18 participants scored their retention on Lesson 5. The average was adjusted accordingly.

DISCUSSION

Two primary findings emerge from the participant feedback. First, Lesson 1 was identified as the most effective lesson for vocabulary retention. Lesson 1 required participants to use the Navajo-English dictionary and create their novel sentences. Nevertheless, Lesson 4 was overwhelmingly seen the most positively, according to participants' comments. Lesson 4 required induction from e-realia. Conversely, the least effective lesson was Lesson 3, in which tokens and their meanings were simply given. According to the comments, the most negatively viewed lesson was Lesson 2, which involved a dialog.

Findings suggested that a substantive difference may exist between what participants perceived as effective on one hand and enjoyable on the other. This suggests that participants, like their students, may find some lessons more enjoyable but not necessarily most helpful with vocabulary retention; both merit our attention. First, Lesson 1, which required participants to use a dictionary, was viewed as the most effective. Usage of both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries brings unique affordances to the language classroom but also brings unique limitations. White's (1997) thorough, albeit dated, article in *Dialog* detailed each, but did not mention the time required in using dictionaries, even online ones (White, 1997). DLIFLC instructors know well how critical time is when advancing learners from zero to even intermediate proficiencies, particularly within a 36-week program. As for enjoyment, Lesson 4's use of e-realia was deemed most enjoyable. During this lesson, participants viewed slides with images in which tokens' meanings were obvious and some were ambiguous. Participants voiced their guesses as to the meanings, meaning that their curiosity was engaged.

Language learner enjoyment, like language learner anxiety, has been studied extensively (Shen, 2021). The finding that e-realia was experienced positively comports with recent research on English as a foreign language learners who appreciated digital realia in vocabulary acquisition (Castro, 2022). Findings thus align with empirically-informed recommendations that pedagogy incorporate activities that boost enjoyment and minimize boredom (Li, 2022).

The bifurcation of efficacy and enjoyment signals that both should be prioritized as pedagogical goals. Recent research has identified the existence of a "positive feedback loop" between enjoyment and gains in performance (Dewaele & Li, 2021). This positive correlation between learners' enjoyment and enhanced performance has also been found to enhance instructors' enjoyment (Yang et al., 2023). Thus, enjoyment is not superfluous to language learning, but critical to learners' investment in their language learning. Instructors could experiment with various approaches and activities and their impact on learners' enjoyment via modest action research projects. Taking the modest findings of this project as a starting point, learners may similarly enjoy (e-)realia, deductive approaches such as the PACE Model (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002), or exercises requiring higher-order thinking rather than lower order ones (Brehm, 2025).

Activities targeting enjoyment may also facilitate learners' investment in language learning. Moving beyond the binary of motivated and unmotivated, the concept of investment sees language learning as mediated by a constellation of socio-cultural factors. These include learners' identities, their various ideologies about the L2 and L1, cultures, the learning environment, etc., and the capital they perceive they are, will, or could acquire from SLA (Darvin & Norton, 2015). What's more, repeated instances of enjoyment, combined with gains in self-efficacy, may help facilitate the development of a learner's identity as a legitimate L2 participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Just as Nation (2001) argued for a language course to balance input, output, language-focused learning, and fluency-development, so should instructors aim to blend efficiency with enjoyment.

Turning to outcomes regarding the worst-perceived methods, the least effective method was identified as the lesson that tasked participants with writing novel sentences using tokens that were explicitly provided both in English and Navajo. Interestingly, explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction together are supported by research (Barcroft, 2012). Despite being tasked with semantic elaboration, this method seems antithetical to active learning strategies, which require learners' engagement *beyond* reading, memorizing, or listening (Harvard University, 2024). This finding, together with the previous, suggests that task-based activities or activities that involve creation or invoke curiosity seem most facilitative of vocabulary acquisition. This implies then that pedagogy should engage learners in activities requiring higher-order thinking for two reasons: not only are they perceived as the most enjoyable method, but they are also the opposite of methods perceived as the most ineffective.

These findings did not result from an empirical study but rather a modest action research project. Critically, it evaluated perceptions of effectiveness rather than effectiveness itself. Both concepts merit exploration. If replicated with greater empirical rigor, a future study would require more expert design, more precise participant sampling, a singular focus on a principle under investigation, involving tighter selection of materials and administration of exercises. Specifically, more attention would be paid to the selection of tokens to ensure their consistency (length, difficulty, etc.). In short, this project hopes to inspire subsequent projects.

To test these findings amongst faculty and/or DLIFLC learners, future work could explore the various approaches within the classroom. Both quantitative and qualitatively-oriented projects

could be elucidating. Purely experimental exercises could be implemented within the Institute. Such work must be mindful of the differences that exist between faculty and learners in terms of demographic differences (age, educational attainment, cultural background, etc.). Notwithstanding, it is worthwhile to not neglect faculty's views on what constitutes enjoyable, effective vocabulary instruction. Instructors' preferences and ideologies inevitably find their way into the classroom, as do their identities (Robertson & Yazan, 2022) and emotions (Yang, 2024). In short, instructors play pivotal roles in how learners invest in their language learning (Anderson, 2022).

Qualitative projects could examine what learners value in vocabulary instruction and what they enjoy in language learning generally. Learners' enjoyment will never be given free reign in our institution, but to ignore learners' enjoyment and preferences is to do so at our peril. Departments could design modest projects exploring learners' preferences in instruction, similar to the one discussed here (pending appropriate approvals). Findings generated therein could help guide curricular and materials design. More generally, an empirical understanding of how DLIFLC learners perceive vocabulary acquisition, and how they go about learning vocabulary (how, with which tools, when, in which circumstances, etc.) would be insightful. Learners of different languages likely have very different methods and perspectives. Data-based observations and findings regarding vocabulary acquisition could prompt evaluations of current practices and the success thereof. A distinct tract of exploration could examine realia, focusing on how it facilitates learners' identities as legitimate users of the language, as well as learners' preferences for/against using authentic materials relative to that which is pedagogically created.

Finally, future work should also focus on DLIFLC instructors themselves. Anecdotally, my positioning of instructors as learners seemed effective in raising instructors' awareness to the importance of and possibilities within vocabulary instruction. Personally, I believe that my language teaching skills are constantly sharpened by my extracurricular participation in additional language courses beyond the one I teach (Anderson, 2024). Research has demonstrated the benefits of adult learners learning two new languages simultaneously, particularly their excelling in information management (Huang et al., 2020). Beyond this, studying multiple languages makes me grow intellectually and inter-culturally. DLIFLC scholars have cited the benefits of promoting among learners a growth mindset (Murtic, 2021). Instructors could model developing a growth mindset through undertaking additional language study. Of course, the Institute could take measures to facilitate such activity. For example, DLIFLC could not only continue to offer faculty the Department of Defense Education Benefit, which reimburses the costs of a job-related course, but also incentivize instructors to seek such opportunities. Ultimately, the institution and departmental leadership must decide what kind of instructors its learners need (Hill et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The fifty-minute training activity I led exposed attendees to various methods of vocabulary instruction. Through this exercise in experiential learning, instructors became learners of some

Navajo vocabulary. The complexities and subtleties of the second/foreign language classroom are experienced differently from the learners' desks than from the instructor's chair. These lessons served as an invitation for the faculty to renew their relationship to SLA by endeavoring to learn a new language. Even modest amounts of an additional language beyond those with which they are familiar may kindle greater empathy among faculty towards their students and renew their sense of activities that work, tedious activities, etc.

Positioned as learners, albeit for a short duration, faculty attendees self-assessed their retention of Navajo tokens in five distinct lessons and provided comments of their choosing. They identified as the most effective format for vocabulary retention the lesson requiring English-Navajo dictionary work. It also identified the lesson utilizing e-realia as the method with the most positive comments. These findings suggest firstly that vocabulary acquisition matters. Assumptions that vocabulary acquisition unfolds in some automatic way seem implausible. Secondly, instruction that tasks learners with either actively doing something or piquing their curiosity seems preferable to those in which learners are positioned to be passive. Thirdly, there is great potential in using authentic (e-)materials, or (e-)realia, if not for its effectiveness, for the enjoyment it affords.

Findings from this modest project suggest that vocabulary instruction be done with intentionality and in alignment with recent research. For keen instructors or departments, actionable steps would be to examine learners' relationship to vocabulary. Reviewing current pedagogies of vocabulary instruction is especially needed if either the instructors identify learners' vocabulary as insufficient at their given level or learners themselves flag vocabulary acquisition as a weakness in the ESQ's. In such cases, departments should pay particular attention to the quantity and quality of current practices regarding implicitness/explicitness, induction/deduction, (e-)realia and images/pedagogically-created materials, ambiguousness/obviousness, and (higher/lower) order thinking embedded in subsequent activities.

At a minimum, additional materials could be created that target vocabulary acquisition. Opportunities abound for collaboration between learners and faculty to create materials: one could envision unique projects being assigned to mentees or to Special Assistance students in which a list of challenging vocabulary is amassed and divided amongst students. Under an instructor's supervision, the learners could create material (e.g., slides using images/e-realia they assemble, book widgets, Canvas projects, etc.), which could be retained by the department for future use with future cohorts/other classes. In this way, learners would be actively contributing to or co-creating materials. This would be a nice legacy for future generations.

For instructors who decide to revisit their vocabulary instructional practices, a wealth of research exists beyond sources here cited which focuses on input processing (Barcroft, 2024) and cognitive issues of SLA on one hand and investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) and socio-cultural issues on the other. DLI faculty and staff should neglect neither, recognizing that SLA requires an ecology of factors (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Once again, instructors with a growth mindset could gain invaluable insights into teaching through their extracurricular study of an additional language.

Ultimately, a more empathetic faculty, i.e., more aware of SLA theories and research findings, will be a more effective faculty.

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APPENDIX A

Tokens by Lesson

Lesson 1	
horse	lin
mountain lion	náshdóítsoh
condor	jeeshóó’
tree	t'iis
river	tooh
Lesson 2	
I need …	yinízin
shut up	nizghéé’
come here	hágo
wait	át’ah
maybe	daats’í
Lesson 3	
I don’t believe it	dooda sha’shin
I hate you.	nijooshłaah
good morning	yá’át’ééh abíní
I forgot	Beisénah
I love you	yóó’ánííníshní
Lesson 4	
stop!	ni’níłtłáád
thank you	ahéhee’
bon appétit! (have a good meal)	Nizhónígo adíiyį́į́ł
please	ąą’ ha’íí baa naniná
good day!	Nizhónígo ch'aanidíínaał
Lesson 5	
how are you?	ąą’ ha’íí baa naniná
hello	yá'át'ééh
what’s your name?	dóó haash yinilyé?
where is the toilet?	ańda’aldáhísha’?
I don’t know	doo shił bééhózin da