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Postsecondary Students' and Instructors' Evaluative Comments about ACTFL's Integrated Performance Assessment

JASON MARTEL
Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

Framed with concepts from the literature on educational innovations, the present study explored postsecondary students' and instructors' evaluative comments about ACTFL's Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA). In the research on the IPA to date, few scholars have explored these key stakeholders' perceptions of the framework, and a robust understanding of their perceptions is crucial for developing strategies geared toward fostering the IPA's uptake in a variety of foreign language education contexts. Data for the study were collected by means of instructor interviews, recordings of instructor professional development meetings, and a student questionnaire. Findings included comments about the format of the IPA framework, the content of midterm and final IPAs, the efficacy of the IPA framework, and studying for IPA-based tests. In light of these findings, strategies are suggested for those interested in implementing the IPA in their classrooms and programs.

INTRODUCTION

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL) Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) is a flexible, powerful tool for assessing foreign language students' communicative abilities. Principally a summative assessment, it contains three tasks—interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational—based on the three modes of communication from ACTFL's World Readiness Standards for Language Learning (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). Teachers design IPAs locally and situate them into their thematic course units. As explained in Adair-Hauck, Glisan, and Troyan's (2013) manual, the IPA framework also includes strategies for connecting teaching with assessment and for giving feedback on student performance.

Although there are no data on how many instructors/educational institutions have adopted this assessment and instructional framework, there is a growing number of studies that have examined various aspects related to its implementation. In one of these studies, Zapata (2016) wrote, "researchers [...] deemed the IPA to be an effective tool to measure L2 students' communicative performance across the three modes of communication at different educational levels" (p. 95). Missing from the research base on the IPA, however, is robust information about whether instructors and students deem it to be an effective tool in regard to foreign language learning. It is arguably more important to know these two groups' perceptions of the framework rather than researchers', for it is they who sit at the front lines of IPA implementation and it is up to them whether IPA institutionalization ultimately occurs (Waters, 2013). The present study thus aims to expand the field's understanding of students' and teachers' views on the IPA, with an eye toward developing strategies for facilitating its use in a greater number of foreign language educational settings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Perceptions and Research on the IPA

As expressed above, a handful of studies have been carried out on the IPA since its inception in the late 1990s/early 2000s. The first, conducted by scholars at ACTFL (Adair-Hauck, Glisan, Koda, Swender, & Sandrock, 2006), chronicled a project whose goals were to develop a standards-based assessment (the IPA), to examine the effectiveness of this assessment, and to "investigate the washback effect...of the IPA on teachers' perceptions of their instructional actions and practices" (p. 372). Following this project, researchers focused, not surprisingly, on student performance, first at the postsecondary level (Glisan, Uribe, & Adair-Hauck, 2007) and then at the elementary level (Davin, Troyan, Donato, & Hellman, 2011). Subsequently, a "fanning out" occurred during which researchers examined a variety of constructs, such as the discourse of IPA feedback conferences (Adair-Hauck & Troyan, 2013), students' perceptions of the IPA (Zapata, 2016), the balance of the modes of communication during IPA implementation (Kissau & Adams, 2016), and instructors' attitudes toward IPA implementation in an intensive summer language program at the postsecondary level (Martel & Bailey, 2016).

The construct of perceptions played a role in some of these inquiries, in both primary and secondary ways. ACTFL's implementation project (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006) investigated the influence of the IPA on teachers' perceptions of their instructional practices, yielding a reported positive effect of the IPA on current teaching and future assessment, reflected in comments such as "[it] made me more aware of the three modes of communication" (p. 372). Zapata (2016) examined students' perceptions of the IPA as well as the relationship between assessment and classroom learning. Noting that students' perceptions "can affect the success of [their] learning experience" (pp. 95–96)

and "can guide administrators and practitioners to make changes that result in more successful learning experiences" (p. 96), she surveyed 1,236 university-level Spanish students who participated in a new curriculum featuring the IPA and found "generally positive attitudes" (p. 98) toward the framework. Positive attitudes uncovered, styled as "beneficial aspects" (p. 98), included preferences for real-life production over memorization and the authentic nature of the IPA, whereas negative attitudes, styled as "unfavorable opinions" (p. 98), varied by level, with lower-level learners expressing difficulty with the listening portion and mid-range learners saying that it was easier to study for traditional-type assessments. In addition, students generally perceived instruction and the IPA as linked.

Interestingly, the construct of perceptions was not defined in the studies cited above, despite its centrality to their inquiries. Furthermore, Zapata (2016) used an array of associated terms without discussing how they relate to one another, such as *attitudes*, *opinions*, *views*, and *concerns*. Ultimately, perceptions, a very broad construct, range from basic acknowledgment or description (e.g., "I notice the IPA has three tasks") to judgment or appraisal (e.g., "I like the IPA because…"). In fact, one could argue that this term is too broad for research purposes if one's goal is to provide specific information for stakeholders invested in implementing educational innovations like the IPA. Thus, the present study adopts a narrow definition of perceptions in the form of "evaluative comments" — i.e., comments that include an appraisal of the IPA. Note that this focus excludes comments about IPA implementation and targets judgments directed specifically toward the *nature* of the framework.

Looking back to the research literature on the IPA, some of the reported perceptions seem to constitute evaluative comments, whereas others do not. For example, in Zapata's (2016) study, preferences for real versus memorized language appear to be evaluative, but struggles with listening might not be. This distinction is impossible to know without looking at the data; a statement like "the listening was difficult" would arguably be more descriptive and less evaluative than one like "I don't like the IPA because the listening section is too difficult." Student comments in Davin et al.'s (2011) study seem to fall into similar categories, with "I knew some words and the ones I did not know, I now know" (p. 616) as predominantly descriptive and "the IPA was sort of challenging and I learned more" (p. 616) as predominantly evaluative. From the teacher vantage point, some of the perspectives articulated in Martel and Bailey's (2016) study constituted evaluations of the IPA (e.g., "I feel it's very beneficial," p. 538), even though the study focused principally on attitudes toward implementation. For rigor's sake, data analyzed by Martel and Bailey (2016) have been reconsidered in the present study and have been reanalyzed using the definition of evaluative comments presented above. To summarize, some of the student and teacher perceptions of the IPA captured in the research literature reflect evaluations of the framework, and the goal of the present study is to add to this base using a specific class of perceptions in the form of evaluative comments.

Educational Innovations and Perceptions

Processes underlying educational innovations have been of interest to scholars in foreign/second language education for some time now (e.g., Markee, 1997). Much research has been produced on the topic with an eye toward what seems to facilitate innovations and what seems to hinder them, and it has been found that perceptions play an important role. According to Stoller (2009), "much research on innovation diffusion, over the years, has determined that the adoption rates of innovations are partially dependent on perceptions (rather than realities) of the innovations themselves" (p. 78). As this quotation indicates, educational innovations are in essence a game of perceptions—that is, whether they succeed or fail depends on what stakeholders think about them, and what is perceived as innovative in one context may not be perceived as such in another (Stoller, 2009). Indeed, Nicholls' (1983) definition of an innovation—"an idea, object, or practice *perceived* as new by an individual or individuals…" (p. 4, emphasis added)—allows for different stakeholders to see innovations in different ways, notably, as innovative or not.

From this research, it has become generally understood that positive perceptions of an innovation can facilitate its success. For example, according to Waters (2013), "...the greater the RELATIVE ADVANTAGE (likely degree of benefit) that end-users perceive an innovation is likely to provide, the greater the probability that they will adopt it" (p. 95, citing Rogers, 2003, emphasis in original). Relatedly, in her research on U.S. intensive English programs, Stoller (2009) proposed a "zone of innovation," which was based on the premise that "innovation adoption rates depend, in part, on middle-range perceptions, rather than perceptions that fall on extreme ends of different continua" (pp. 78–79). She included six constructs in her model: compatibility, complexity, explicitness, flexibility, originality, and visibility. As an example, she claimed that teachers are less likely to adopt an innovation if it is too compatible with what they already do, as making changes to their practice would not be worth the effort, or if it is incompatible with what they already do, as such disparity might create negative feelings. With the zone of innovation in mind, Stoller (2009) recommended that those invested in the diffusion of innovations should explain them in two ways: (1) "so that they fall within the zone of innovation; in other words, they must be perceived as being neither excessively divergent from, nor too similar to current practices" (p. 79), and (2) so that "they are perceived in the most positive light early in the process" (p. 78).

RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the gaps in the literature outlined above, the following research question was articulated for this study: In a postsecondary intensive summer language program, what are students' and instructors' perceptions (i.e., evaluative comments) of the IPA system?

METHODS

Context

The present study was conducted in the Summer Intensive Language Program (SILP) at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS). The program lasts eight weeks, from mid-June to mid-August, and offers instruction from elementary through advanced levels in five languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish. The program's curriculum is promoted as communicative and content-based; beyond these designations, instructors choose which materials they wish to use in order to meet the proficiency targets set for the classes that are assigned to them. A typical day in the program consists of four-and-a-half hours of class, optional free tutoring, and an average of four hours of homework. In addition, students have the opportunity to participate in bi-weekly co-curricular activities, such as a Ramadan Iftar meal, an excursion to San Francisco's Chinatown, and a viticulture lesson from a French sommelier. The program's languages serve as the lingua franca for classes and program activities, yet there is no contract requiring students to speak these languages 24 hours a day. During the 2015 session, when data were collected for this study, there were five language coordinators, 15 instructors, and several other support staff, in addition to 117 students who were enrolled in the program.

For the summer 2015 session, the program's associate director (the author) required all instructors to use the IPA framework for designing midterm and final exams during weeks four and eight of the program. The reasons were to cultivate a common vocabulary for characterizing and gathering data on student language growth. In order to support IPA implementation, he assigned readings from Adair-Hauck et al.'s (2013) manual to be completed before the start of the program and then dedicated several hours during program orientation to discussing the IPA. In addition, he conducted non-mandatory weekly brownbag professional development sessions on various topics related to the IPA (e.g., designing effective interpersonal tasks) and gave feedback on all instructors' IPA drafts for both the midterm and the final. Prior to IPA implementation, instructors gave what were called "contextualized assessments" as their midterm and final exams, which contained both grammatical and skills-based elements.

Participants

All 15 instructors were invited to participate in the study. Twelve of them gave their consent, with representation from all program languages. Most (10/12) were instructors of record in other institutions of higher learning across the country during the academic year, and two of them held academic-year positions at MIIS. There was a range of teaching experience in the group, from a recent graduate of a master's program to someone who had already retired, as

well as a range of years of working for the program, from one to eight summers. In addition, the 117 students were invited to participate in the study, and ultimately 60 of them did. Specific bio-data were not collected on the students who participated, and student responses to surveys were not associated with their identities. Considering the student body as a whole, half the students participated in SILP as a prerequisite for beginning an internationally-focused graduate program at the Institute, and the other half participated for a variety of reasons, including transferring credits to their home institutions, professional uses (e.g., learning Spanish for working with ESL students), and personal enjoyment. The average age of students in the program was 26.7 years, and most came from the continental United States.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data sources for this study included:

- recordings of instructor orientation and weekly brownbag professional development sessions related to the IPA;
- interviews with instructors at the beginning, middle, and end of the program; and
- a student questionnaire, completed at the end of the program.

As described above, professional development sessions involved open discussions about the nature of the IPA and questions/challenges associated with implementation. Instructor interviews included questions toward getting to know their backgrounds and any previous experience with the IPA (beginning interview); what they felt about their instruction leading up to the midterm IPA and how that exam went (middle interview); what they felt about their instruction leading up to the final IPA and how that exam went (end interview); and their general thoughts about the IPA after using it during the summer (end interview). The student questionnaire (see Appendix A) asked students to react to nine questions using a nine-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Each question also had a space in which respondents could type open-ended comments to explain their views. The questions asked students to comment on directions and expectations for the IPA exams, what they thought the exams were intending to evaluate, the relationship between the exams and the instruction that preceded them, the difficulty level of reading and listening passages on the exams, and their enjoyment level in regard to taking IPA-based exams. Finally, there was space at the end of the questionnaire in which students could provide additional open-ended comments related to the design of the exams and the relationship between the exams and the instruction that preceded them.

Once collected, the data were pooled and instances of evaluative comments were identified using the definition articulated above—that is, comments including an appraisal of the IPA. Evaluative comments containing instructors' perceptions of students' perceptions were not included, such as the

following: "So I was thinking, okay, how about this IPA thing? How are [the students] going to take it? But they like it. They like it." Then, similar to Zapata (2016), the evaluative comments were sorted on a continuum ranging from positive to negative, keeping those from instructors and students separate. Finally, themes across both groups were identified in an iterative fashion using principles of thematic coding (Baralt, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002)—a process that involved grouping related codes into over-arching categories, generating a higher level of abstraction in the data.

FINDINGS

Codes generated during analysis of the student and instructor data are included in Appendix B and C, respectively, with positive evaluations in the left-hand column, negative evaluations in the right-hand column, and middle-ground evaluations in the middle column. Four themes emerged upon considering student and instructor codes together, which are presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Comments about the Format of the IPA Framework

Both students and instructors made evaluative comments about the format of the IPA—that is, about its overall structure. Students considered the format to be "solid" and "appropriate," and liked the manner in which it was partitioned. For example, one student stated, "I liked that the exam was split into different methods, which were clearly explained, and they seemed to focus on different areas." Another stated, "I liked the design of the midterm. Different components of one test so one test didn't feel more stressful than the other." According to the instructors, the structure of IPA was interesting and effective, and one noted that he liked the presentational task, in particular.

Above all, both students and instructors appreciated the holistic nature of the IPA, as opposed to tests that focus on one or a few skills or grammatical features. One student said, "I like the holistic nature of this evaluation system and that it doesn't just evaluate written tests." An instructor said, "I really like to look at my students' learning outcome as a whole, from a whole picture, not whether they can translate the sentences correctly or not."

Despite positive recognition of the comprehensive nature of the IPA by both students and instructors, one student remarked on the unevenness of the difficulty across tasks, stating, "Some parts were easier than others, the presentation component was very difficult and overwhelming for me. But I still see the value in it."

Negative perceptions related to the format of the IPA emerged in the student data but not in the instructor data. Students made comments expressing dislike for the Presentational Speaking, for example, "...the Presentational Speaking was an outlier that clearly must not be counted as anything close to a real life situation." However, there was evidence attributing this dislike to task

administration rather than to the nature of the task itself: "[the Presentational Speaking came out of no where [*sic*], was poorly explained and structured, and it just threw me off." Next, one student found the titles of the various tasks (e.g., Presentational Speaking) to be confusing: "I don't really think the fancy names are necessary; they just kind of confused me and it wasn't really clear what should be expected." Finally, contrary to the comments above related to the different methods, one student did not like the way in which the IPA was partitioned, especially given his/her level: "I do understand but I don't think it was the best for our level to test this way and in this manner. It seemed broken up."

Comments about the Content of Midterm and Final IPAs

Students and instructors made comments about the content of midterm and final IPAs, ranging from positive to negative. On the positive side, a student appreciated the inclusion of multiple skills: "I do like that it is more than just a written test, however, and enjoy the fact that the exam in and of itself serves as an opportunity to practice."

Both students and instructors appreciated that the IPAs engendered real-life language use. One student said,

> It seems to be a much more real-world way of language testing and I feel more confident on useful parts of communication—in previous systems I felt good with grammar structures and memorization, but the practice of synthesizing paragraphs and the use of oral communication for the IPA has probably benefited me in my studies.

Similarly, an instructor stated,

> I think it's beneficial, the reason is if I don't do IPA, I will choose the traditional method to test, to examine my students' progress. I will ask them to fill in the blanks. I will ask them to do the translation and I think students with the IPA, students may feel that they can really show some real world problems.

There was thus a recognition from both stakeholder groups that the IPAs elicited performance resembling language as it is used outside the classroom, which was considered to be a positive feature of the framework.

Middle-ground comments were varied. Students thought that the IPAs needed a grammar component, were too easy, were potentially unfair in that they did not contain a grammar component, and had too much content: "It's a lot to be tested on at once." Instructors had similar concerns, that the IPA might be too easy and possibly too comprehensive: "Certainly the five-task IPA is quite comprehensive, maybe to a fault." This comment reflects the associate director's encouragement to use a five-task version of the IPA instead of a three-task version containing both interpretive and presentational modalities rather than choosing between the two, as instructed in Adair-Hauck et al. (2013).

One negative comment concerning the content of an IPA test emerged in the student data regarding construct irrelevance. The student stated,

> Some of the questions on the listening and comprehension sections were completely unrelated from the language I am learning. How does finding what organization the article have help me to better my Spanish skills for example. My knowledge in my language would have been better tested with a traditional test.

Here, the student did not consider certain subconstructs assessed in the interpretive tasks (e.g., organizational features) as representative of listening and reading comprehension. This student may have thus been operating with a more traditional conceptualization of comprehension based principally on detail-oriented comprehension questions, which continue to represent the dominant approach taken to checking for understanding used by many foreign language teachers.

Comments about the Efficacy of the IPA Framework

Again, there was a range of comments from both students and instructors in the data regarding the efficacy of the IPA—that is, its usefulness for multiple purposes. Students thought that the IPA accelerated their progress and was effective for assessing that progress. They also considered it more accurate and useful than traditional ways of assessing language. For example, one student wrote,

> I've never been tested this way before, but I thought the results revealed the most accurate assessment of my grasp on the language. It is easy to do well on normal tests without actually learning or retaining much, but it is impossible to do so with the IPA.

Instructors also saw the IPA as useful for evaluating language-in-use and considered it a good fit for a proficiency-based program like SILP: "Besides, I assume it is a good structure to bring in as the program focuses on proficiency and some instructors might still be used to testing students solely on structures and vocabulary."

Only students expressed middle-ground feelings about the IPA. One student was unsure about its helpfulness ("I am not entirely sure it has been helpful"), and another student considered it to be less effective if not combined with a traditional test ("I like the IPA system and think it provides a valuable approach with the fluency-based learning, but I think doing ONLY the IPA isn't as effective as it would be to combine an IPA style test with a more traditional test").

Negative comments about the IPA's efficacy surfaced solely in the instructor data. For example, one instructor stated,

> I understand because we're analyzing their performance, right, but I don't know. I see what the benefit for a study is on this particular issue but maybe not what the benefit for language learning is. In order to

> map out their process, cool, but in order to foment more progress, I
> don't really see it.

Here, the instructor felt as if the IPA could be used to document student gains in
language learning yet could not actually stimulate language learning.

Comments about Studying for IPA-based Tests

A final theme surfaced related to the role that studying plays in
preparing for IPA-based tests, which was interestingly cast both positively and
negatively by the instructors and in a middle-ground fashion by students. This
theme related to a perspective circulating among instructors and students that
IPA-based tests cannot really be studied for.

One instructor claimed, "I think it's good, the idea of not being able to
prepare for the exam." Another stated,

> What is different, I think, is testing, if I can call it that, I know it's a bad
> word. Testing should be assessment but testing in the past has been
> measuring what they have learned. Have you learned this? Yes. Have
> you learned that? Yes. That's not what this is and I get that. We'll see
> how the students respond to that. I think it'll be nice because it'll
> remove their anxiety which can get in the way so much. Some of my
> students are these good little A students. They're the worst. "I want an
> A. I don't understand that. Let's stop and talk about it so I can get it
> perfect." It's not really going to help you with the IPAs.

In this excerpt, the instructor characterized the IPA as different from traditional
testing because it required a tolerance for ambiguity, given the use of authentic
texts and tasks. Therefore, a traditional cramming approach would not work.

On the other side of the coin, instructors perceived negative aspects of
the IPA-based tests as ones that cannot be studied for. One instructor connected
this attribute with motivation:

> What is it that I don't like about it? It's because I don't think it helps,
> you can use tests to incentivize learning or to make it happen, right, as
> a motivation. When you can't study for a test because they don't know
> what the hell is on it when they can just go review their notes, it's not
> as directed. I feel like there's not as big of a leap made. Usually after a
> midterm, in cramming, we all know cramming is not the answer but
> I'm talking about those students who would've seriously taken a few
> days and reviewed everything, you know what I mean? I feel like that
> was lost.

Here, the instructor considered the perceived lack of incentive to study for IPA-
based tests as detrimental to students' growth in the language.

Finally, students' comments regarding the role of studying reflected
middle-ground positions, as evidenced by the following:

> I think professors should find a way to prepare students for the fact that
> these tests are DIFFERENT than what they are used to seeing. Students

> need to know they need to study in a different way (and cramming won't really work!) and make sure they get a really good night's sleep before the test. Ultimately, their confidence and relaxation on the testing day will really impact their comprehension, and anxiety will really negatively affect their performance. I think students need to know to expect something different ahead of time!

In this excerpt, the student encouraged instructors to explain to their students that if they want to succeed on IPA-based tests, they need to take a different approach than for traditional exams.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated students' and instructors' perceptions of the IPA in the form of evaluative comments—comments including appraisals of the IPA. Instances of evaluative comments were lifted from a variety of data sources, including instructor professional development workshops, instructor interviews, and a student survey. These comments were coded, and then over-arching themes were developed across both groups' comments. The themes that emerged included comments about the format of the IPA framework, about the content of midterm and final IPAs, about the efficacy of the IPA framework, and about studying for IPA-based tests.

These findings are important in that they contribute to a baseline regarding key stakeholders' considerations of the IPA. Without a sufficient picture of how students and teachers appraise this innovative form of assessment, it is difficult to predict its uptake in foreign language programs, given the close relationship between perceptions and innovations (Nicholls, 1983; Stoller, 2009). Previous studies provided a limited amount of information regarding students' and teachers' evaluations of the IPA (e.g., Zapata, 2016), and the present study helps to paint a more complete picture by providing information from a context that has so far been underexplored—i.e., an intensive postsecondary summer language program. Although some of this study's findings were novel, others corroborated those from previous research, such as comments related to the real-life nature of the IPA (Zapata, 2016).

From a theoretical standpoint, it is interesting to wonder if the evaluative comments shared by participants point to long-term uptake of the IPA, otherwise known as institutionalization (Waters, 2013). As a reminder, innovations are more likely to succeed if stakeholders perceive them as beneficial (Waters, 2013). The qualitative comments made by instructors and students in this study suggest multiple possible outcomes. For example, positive comments regarding the holistic nature of the IPA may indicate institutionalization, whereas comments pertaining to the lack of motivation stemming from the perceived inability to study for IPA-based tests may indicate resistance, adaptation, or failure to adopt the innovation. Similarly, some comments captured in this study can be analyzed through the lens of Stoller's (2009) zone of innovation. As a reminder, an innovation's adoption is related to

stakeholders' perceptions of its compatibility, complexity, explicitness, flexibility, originality, and visibility; if it is perceived extremely (i.e., too much or too little) in regard to any of these categories, it is less likely to be adopted. Here, instructors' characterization of the IPA as a good fit for the program seems to indicate compatibility, thus potential adoption. Conversely, students' and instructors' portrayal of the IPA as too easy could indicate failure to adopt (or at least failure to adopt as is). However, time must pass before the trajectory the IPA takes in the program studied here is known.

This study has several clinical implications. From a programmatic point of view, administrators interested in implementing the IPA might publicly highlight stakeholders' positive appraisals of the framework, which were numerous in this study, in order to gain buy-in. Conversely, they could work with instructors to practically address negative and middle-ground concerns (see Stoller, 2009). Strategies related to negative and middle-ground comments from this study that instructors could implement in their classrooms might include:

- supplementing the IPA with an independent, traditional/metalinguistic grammar section;
- making sure that students have adequate practice with IPA tasks in the curriculum leading up to IPA-based tests;
- using more accessible task titles;
- giving student-friendly rationales for the various subconstructs of the interpretive task;
- discussing the slow, ever-unfolding nature of second language acquisition with students; and
- discussing the role of studying for IPA-based tests with students.

The role of studying for IPA-based tests represented a very interesting finding in this study. It is arguable that IPA-based tests can indeed be studied for, given their nature as a performance and not a proficiency tests (Adair-Hauck et al., 2013). That is, they are connected to a curriculum, and students are meant to deploy the structures and vocabulary they studied in class on them. Participants in the program studied here may have thus overly conflated the IPA with proficiency testing, leading to a potentially unhelpful perspective at the expense of student progress. It is not surprising that this conflation happened, however, because the IPA framework draws upon proficiency-based concepts and language, principally evidenced by the rubrics provided in Adair-Hauck et al. (2013). Moving forward, administrators and instructors would do well to explain to students that IPA-based tests might look and feel different from other assessments they have experienced in their language educations, all while highlighting that a faithful engagement with the curriculum and diligent studying are what it takes to stimulate language learning. In other words, IPA-based tests can be studied for, yet they cannot really be crammed for.

Finally, it is worth noting that several of the comments captured in this study relate to washback, which Bailey and Curtis (2015) define as "the effect a test has on teaching and learning" (p. 3). For example, student perceptions that

the IPA stimulated their language learning seem to indicate positive washback—i.e., a beneficial influence. To date, there has been very little research conducted on the washback effect of the IPA (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006), despite repeated calls (e.g., Davin et al., 2011). The washback effect of the IPA in the program studied here will be revisited in future studies by the researcher and his colleagues.

CONCLUSION

This study illustrates the importance of considering teachers' and students' perceptions when predicting the trajectory of an educational innovation such as ACTFL's IPA. Comments shared by participants highlight this flexible and innovative assessment system's potential and point to concrete strategies for attending to ways in which it was not so positively perceived. Although the viewpoints captured here relate to a specific context and may be considered limited in their generalizability, it is hoped that they are helpful to those invested implementing the IPA in a range of contexts, with the goal of providing maximally impactful learning experiences for our country's foreign language learners.

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APPENDIX A

Student Questionnaire

This summer, your midterm and final exams followed the Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) system. Please answer the following questions about your experiences with this framework by indicating the number that best represents your feelings. Use the following scale:

      1 = strongly disagree (SD)
      3 = disagree (D)
      5 = neutral (N)
      7 = agree (A)
      9 = strongly agree (SA)

There is also space for you to make a comment about each item.

Thank you for your input. Your ideas will be used to help shape future course offerings and assessment procedures. Please note that this survey is anonymous; your name will not be attached to your comments.

1. The directions and expectations for the midterm exam were clear.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SD		D		N		A		SA

Please explain your rating for this item:

2. The directions and expectations for the final exam are clear.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SD		D		N		A		SA

Please explain your rating for this item:

3. I understand what the midterm exam was trying to evaluate.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SD		D		N		A		SA

Please explain your rating for this item:

4. Based on what my teacher has told me about it, I understand what the final exam will try to evaluate.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SD		D		N		A		SA

Please explain your rating for this item:

5. The midterm exam was clearly related to the activities we did in the first four weeks of class.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SD		D		N		A		SA

Please explain your rating for this item:

6. The activities we have been doing in the second four weeks of class are related to what I know about the final exam.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SD		D		N		A		SA

Please explain your rating for this item:

7. The reading passages on the midterm exam were appropriate for my level.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SD		D		N		A		SA

Please explain your rating for this item:

8. The listening passages on the midterm exam were appropriate for my level.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SD		D		N		A		SA

Please explain your rating for this item:

9. I enjoyed using the IPA system for language learning and assessment this summer.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
SD		D		N		A		SA

Please explain your rating for this item:

10. Are there any other comments you would like to share about the design of the midterm and final exams?

Comments:

11. Are there any other comments you would like to share about the relationship between the midterm and final exams and the instruction preceding them?

Comments:

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

APPENDIX B

Student Codes

Positive	Middle-ground	Negative
• Simple • Uncomplicated • Effective for evaluating progress • Split into different "methods" • Covered the important parts of language • A pedagogically wise strategy • A solid structure • Holistic • Emphasis on real language use • More accurate assessment of abilities (than traditional testing) • Accelerated learning • Interesting • More useful than traditional testing • Multiple sections diffuse stress • Great • Appropriate format • Challenging, but worth it • General positive (e.g., "I like it") • More than just writing • Practice opportunity	• Unfamiliar • Uneven difficulty across components, yet valuable • Needs a grammar component • Challenging • Tiring • Fine • (Too) easy • Less effective if not combined with a traditional test • Not sure it was helpful • Nebulous • Should be used as final/proficiency test, not weekly test • Rubric limiting (but versatile) • Can't study for • Potentially unfair since no traditional grammar aspect • Too much content • Too spread out • Didn't enjoy as much as usual tests/quizzes • Should be norm referenced • Prefer a traditional test	• Dislike presentational speaking • General negative (e.g., "not a fan") • The titles are confusing • Wrong for level (but which?) • "Broken up" • Too time consuming • Construct irrelevance (e.g., organizational features)

APPENDIX C

Instructor Codes

Positive	Middle-ground	Negative
• Can't study for • General positive (e.g., "I like it") • Real-life language use • Holistic view of student abilities • Moves away from traditional testing • Effective for evaluating (proficiency)/fits with proficiency focus • Confirmed post-program placements • A fair grading method • Like presentational piece • Interesting/effective format • Useful • Cool • Interesting • Beneficial innovation • Pedagogically sound • Research-based • Stimulating • Enlivens teaching	• Unfamiliar • Too easy? • Too comprehensive?	• Can't study for • Doesn't stimulate enough progress

AUTHOR

Jason Martel, *Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)/Teaching Foreign Languages (TFL), Graduate School of Translation, Interpretation, and Language Education; Associate Director, Summer Intensive Language Program; Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.*

Language-learning Strategy Preferences among College-level Language Students

HEZI BROSH
United States Naval Academy

This study aimed to elicit students' perceptions regarding their language-learning strategy preferences (LLSPs). A sample of 198 college-level students participated. Data were collected through a questionnaire and interviews. The findings reveal that language students tend to adopt a holistic view of the learning task and relate it to real-life and personal experience. They favor application-directed learning strategies that establish concrete processing and ultimately utilize knowledge beyond the classroom. By selecting speaking and conversation, interaction with the teacher, and reading aloud, participants clearly indicated their preference to be proactive in order to make the language more real for them, to boost their performance in using it, and to develop language skills to last a lifetime. Significant differences were found with regard to LLSPs based on learning experience. Whereas advanced-level participants attributed preference to speaking and conversation, beginner-level participants attributed preference to interaction with the teacher and grammar and writing. The empirical evidence from this study could have implications for theoretical models of effective language instruction, second-language (L2) teacher education programs, and curriculum development.

INTRODUCTION

When learning a foreign language, students bring to the classroom diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, varied beliefs, and utilize distinct learning strategies as their preferred means of receiving, processing, and integrating information (Cohen, 1998; Ellis, 1994; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, & Küpper, 1985; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford,

1990a). This paper focuses on multiple languages and identifying common language learning strategies.

Language learning can be compared to a continuous problem-solving process at different levels of complexity, requiring the use of specific strategies. Given the fact that every teaching-learning situation is unique, and that subjects differ from one another, there are teaching or learning strategies that are effective in one setting but less effective in another. To accommodate individual students, language instructors develop student-centered instruction that gives learners more autonomy and responsibility for their learning and reduces their dependency on instructors (Bialystok, 1978; Cohen, 1984; Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2008; O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990a, 2003; Rubin, 1975; Tarone & Yule, 1989; Wenden, 1986). This change in teaching philosophy has increased the need to investigate the learning strategies that students apply in and out of classrooms. Scholars consider language-learning strategies to have practical implications for educational contexts. Identifying, describing, and classifying these strategies may facilitate understanding of how they influence students' language learning and the level of success they reach (Kamińska, 2014; Oxford, 1990a, 1990b, 2003).

To that end, this study, done in a foreign language learning environment, elicited students' perceptions regarding their Language-Learning Strategy Preferences (LLSPs) and examined differences with regard to LLSPs based on learning experience; i.e., between students who study a foreign language for two years or less (Group 1) and those who study a foreign language for three years or more (Group 2). The students who participated in this study took seven different foreign languages (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, French, Spanish, and German) in which competence or proficiency is not needed for survival purposes. The contribution of this study to the existing data on learning strategies could heighten awareness among foreign language instructors regarding LLSPs and guide them to formulate a customized, effective teaching plan for their target set of students in order to facilitate learning and ultimately influence students' academic growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW
LANGUAGE-LEARNING STRATEGIES

As defined by Oxford (1992/1993, p. 18), a language-learning strategy consists of "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use to deal with a specific learning task or situation in order to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language." (A comprehensive discussion about definitions, see Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Cohen, 1996; Kamińska, 2014; O'Malley et al., 1985; Tarone, 1983.)

Cohen (2011) differentiates between three main types of strategies: (a) language-learning and -use strategies; (b) skill-area strategies pertaining to the four basic language skills; and (c) strategies that are classified by function—that

is, metacognitive, cognitive, affective, or social (Chamot, 1987; Oxford, 1990a). Both metacognitive and cognitive strategies incorporate the student's preferred mode of perceiving, reflecting, and retaining information (Chamot, 1987; Cohen, 2012; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Ehrman & Oxford 1990).

A metacognitive learning strategy relates to a student's thinking, planning, and judgment of cognitive activities. A metacognitive strategy includes activities for the student to monitor and assume responsibility for his or her learning, reflect, and evaluate (Cohen, 2011; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). The ability to reflect and manage learning effectively is a worthwhile skill to acquire, and it prevents the illusion of knowing something but, in reality, such knowledge does not exist (Pashler et al., 2008). Furthermore, students with a high level of metalinguistic awareness are more likely to apply the appropriate language-learning strategies that match their learning styles (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2003).

A cognitive learning strategy refers to processes and behaviors that relate to specific learning activities employed by a student in order to perceive, organize, retain, and use information (Cohen, 2011; Vermunt, 1996). Activities include repeating words or phrases, reciting texts silently or aloud, memorizing a list of new words, summarizing, note taking, and translating from L2 to L1 (Kolb, 1984; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990a, 1990b, 2003). As students process information differently, they may favor various cognitive solutions for acquiring and analyzing new data. Some may prefer writing down words or sentences, some may find that they recall new words better when they are associated with images or sounds, and others may desire grammatical explanations. Using strategies in creative ways helps students develop an individualized approach to learning (Weaver & Cohen, 1994; Kolb, 1984).

In her study of 208 Japanese college students, Hagino (2002) argued that there is no student who uses a single learning strategy; rather, each student uses a mix of several strategies to enhance and personalize learning. Such strategies can have a continuum of effects that might be extended, or otherwise modified, as the student develops and as certain types of motivation change as a result of the student's learning experiences (Ellis, 1994; Kamińska, 2014; Vermunt, 1996). Furthermore, there is no single strategy that is appropriate for every student or every task, thus a student needs the flexibility to shift strategies in order to match the learning settings, the instructor methodology, and the program requirements (Ehrman, 1996; Weaver & Cohen, 1994; Cohen, 2003).

Early studies of language strategies focused on identifying the learning strategies used by the "good language learner," with the assumption that such strategies correlate with effective learning outcomes. This view of effective language-learning strategies incorporated the argument that students need some knowledge of *how* to learn in order to acquire new information effectively (Chamot, 2008). As a result, the idea of teaching effective strategies to struggling students, in order to enhance learning outcomes, gained much support. (For a detailed discussion of strategy training and variables affecting learning strategies use, see Rivera-Mills & Plonsky, 2007). Other studies have

revealed that learning outcomes do not depend on the use of specific "effective" strategies but on their suitability to the learning environment, the materials, and a given learning task (Weaver & Cohen, 1994; Chamot, 2012), as well as to other strategy-related factors, including: learning style, learner autonomy, proficiency level, metalinguistic awareness, gender, and motivation (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1999, 2001). Using appropriate strategies is what differentiates the good language learner from the less effective one and could explain the countless variations among students using the same learning strategies (Cohen, 2011; Oxford, 2003; Oxford & Schramm, 2007).

The student's learning strategy type and use are also directly linked to another factor—the student's underlying distinct learning style. A language-learning style is an individual's mode, or general approach used, in learning a new language or other subjects (Oxford, 2001, 2003; Reid, 1998). Style provides a broad path to learning and consists of a blend of cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements (Oxford, 2003; Oxford & Ehrman, 1988; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Scholars have argued that unlike learning strategies, learning styles are relatively fixed, and that forcing students to alter natural styles does more harm than good (Dunn & Griggs, 1998). Strategies, not functioning independently of styles (Cohen, 1998), should be taken into account when dealing with strategy use or planning strategies-based training (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 2001, 2003; Reid, 1998) (For an in-depth discussion and review of learning styles and strategies, see Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Oxford & Schramm, 2007; Kamińska, 2014).

Another factor that may affect the use of learning strategies is language proficiency (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990a, 1999, 2003 Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Studies have found that the relationship between the two could be either linear (greater strategy use frequency leads to greater proficiency) or curvilinear (beyond initial correlation, learning-strategy use decreases as proficiency level continues to grow, perhaps due to automatic strategy use) (See, Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1999; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Other studies also have found differences in strategy choice between beginners and more advanced students. O'Malley et al. (1985) who investigated the range and frequency of learning strategy uses among beginning- and intermediate-level English as a second Language (ESL) students, found that both groups used cognitive strategies more often than metacognitive ones, but the intermediate group showed a tendency to give preference to metacognitive strategies. They found that repetition was the strategy used most frequently by ESL students. Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) found that whereas beginner-level students focused on strategies revolving around repetition, more advanced students focused on strategies that showed a deeper understanding of the systematic nature of the target language.

In sum, because learning strategy use is related to a variety of factors, and because no single set of L2 teaching strategies can satisfy all student needs, it is crucial to identify, assess, and understand students' preferences and how they perceive and interact with both the target language and the learning

environment. The instructor could then design complementary instructional interventions to address individual learning needs and develop a comprehensive teaching (Oxford, 2003), ultimately enhance student achievement rates, and provide a foundation for lifelong learning.

Research Questions

Framed by an understanding of the impact of learning strategies on effective language learning and teaching and of the relationship between proficiency level and specific learning strategies applied by students, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the LLSPs among participants across seven languages?
2. Are there differences between participants who have been studying an L2 for two years or less and participants who have been learning L2 for three or four years regarding their LLSPs?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

In line with the guidelines for ethical research, participants received general information about the study—its aim, methods, means of data storage and handling, and that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. After receiving the information, participants signed a consent form. Of a possible total of 900 college-level students of a majority male institution (males 77% and females 23%) who were enrolled in seven languages, a sample of 198 students between the ages of 18 and 23 was randomly selected from classes conducted three times a week. The participants were divided into two groups based upon years of study. Group 1 consisted of participants with two or fewer years studying L2 and Group 2 participants with three to four years of L2 studying. It is important to note that the groups were not divided based upon proficiency.

Assessing language proficiency in second-language-acquisition (SLA) studies is typically done through a professional test, such as the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) or other tests described in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (2012) or through an independent measure. Determining students' proficiency merely by course level is a limitation. The languages that participants were learning in this study varied in terms of difficulty and the time needed to reach proficiency (e.g., Japanese, Chinese, and Arabic are harder and more time-consuming to learn by native speakers of English than Spanish or French. See Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Language Difficulty Ranking, 2016). Therefore, the range of proficiency levels among any given class varied widely, and that level was not necessarily indicative of a student's proficiency, because there might be a variation, for example, among oral, written, reading, and listening proficiency. Table 1 describes the participants as follows: number, language,

and year of study.

Table 1
Participants: Number, Language, and Year of Study

	Arabic	*Chinese*	*Spanish*	*French*	*German*	*Russian*	*Japanese*	*Total*
Number	82*	17	39	15	21	7	17	198
Percentage	41.4%	8.6%	19.7%	7.6%	10.6%	3.5%	8.6%	100%
Male	59	12	28	11	17	6	13	146
Female	23	5	11	4	4	1	4	52**
Year of Study								
1st	19		11					30
2nd	44		14	15	10	7	17	107
3rd	19	17			11			47
4th			14					14

* More classes were scheduled on Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays, and hence the over-representation of Arabic students in the sample.
** The educational institution from which the data were elicited is a majority male institution.

Data Collection

The data were collected by means of a questionnaire and follow-up semi-structured interviews toward the end of the spring semester in a two-semester system.

The Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was designed to gather data about LLSPs. It featured a list of 24 learning strategies that were chosen to reflect a variety of learning styles. The strategies on the list were drawn from research literature (Strategy Inventory of Language Learning [SILL], Oxford, 1990a) and from a preliminary poll that asked students to rate their three preferred LLSPs. The students polled did not participate in the study. The survey questionnaire was administered during class time, and participants were asked to choose the three top LLSPs and to rank-order them as 1, 2, and 3. The survey questionnaire was answered anonymously—participants were not asked to provide any information that might identify them or their institution. It is important to note context/framework in which participants rank-ordered their three top LLSPs.

Semi-structured Interviews

To supplement the primary data gathered through the survey questionnaire, the author of this study conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 participants (eight males and seven females) who were randomly selected from the 198 participants. To address the representativeness of this sample and to obtain balanced information from a wide variety of perspectives, all seven languages were represented—three participants who were studying Arabic (two males and one female) and two participants (one male and one female) from those studying each of the other languages. Participants from each group were assigned consecutive numbers from 1 to *N,* followed by the word male or female, and then numbers were selected from each of the seven tables. The information gathered during these interviews provided insight and understanding about the motivation and reasons of participant preference for some strategies over others, revealing further particular themes derived from the findings. An *Interview Guide*, which included a predetermined set of open-ended questions, was prepared to prompt discussion that enabled participants to express their views and ideas and to provide reliable, comparable, and qualitative data. By interviewing Groups 1 and 2, it was possible to compare perceptions and preferences between the two. The interview questions were phrased in a way not to affect the interviewees' answers or to lead to specific ones. The questions also enabled the interviewer to probe for details. Here are a few examples:

- Can you tell me your three preferred language-learning strategies?
- Why do you prefer them?
- The majority of participants preferred the strategies *speaking and conversation*, *interaction with the teacher*, and *reading aloud*. What is your reaction to that?
- Why do you think some participants select *reading aloud* among the three preferred strategies?
- The results of the study showed that Group 1 differed from Group 2 by attributing preference to *interaction with the teacher*. What can you make of this?

The interviews, lasting about 15 minutes, were conducted in an informal, friendly atmosphere that facilitated a natural flow of ideas and opinions. After greeting the interviewee, the interviewer explained the context and purpose of the interview and asked for his or her consent to record the interview. To gain their trust, the interviewer made it clear at the beginning that responses would remain confidential and anonymous. The interviews started with warm-up questions, followed by more focused questions taken from the *Interview Guide*.

RESULTS

LLSPs

The participants' LLSPs were analyzed and trends were identified. It is worth noting that participants interpreted and understood the 24 strategies on the list in their own way. In general, the nature of the language classroom instruction in the educational institution from which the data was elicited could be characterized as having a strong emphasis on effective oral and written communication with a stress on multicultural awareness and regional expertise. This is in line with the institution's mission and students' goals and expectations. The specific classroom instruction in each language, however, was not investigated.

Table 2
Students' Distribution of Frequencies Regarding LLSPs Across Seven
Languages in Percentages (N=198)*

		1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Total
1.	Checking homework in class	3.50	6.00	5.50	15.00
2.	Frontal teaching	5.00	2.50	2.00	9.50
3.	Reading aloud	8.10	4.50	7.10	19.70
4.	Listening (for comprehension)	5.00	7.60	4.50	17.10
5.	Watching movies and video clips	2.00	4.00	3.00	9.00
6.	Working individually	2.50	1.00	2.50	6.00
7.	Translation from L1 to L2	4.50	3.50	5.00	13.00
8.	Translation from L2 to L1	3.00	5.00	3.50	11.50
9.	Spelling and dictation	3.50	3.00	4.50	11.00
10.	Correcting sentences on the board	4.50	5.00	4.50	14.00
11.	Speaking and conversation	24.20	20.60	21.20	66.00
12.	Interaction with the teacher	10.10	9.10	5.00	24.20
13.	Tests and quizzes	2.00	2.00	3.00	7.00
14.	Grammar and writing	4.50	4.50	3.50	12.50
15.	Group work	3.00	3.00	5.50	11.50
16.	Flashcards to learn words	5.50	3.50	6.00	15.00

* The following LLSPs, where the votes totaled less than 5%, are not included in the table: songs, 4.54%; games, 4.00%; learning vocabulary through pictures, 4.00%; using the dictionary, 3.50%; pronunciation drills, 2.02%; working with computers, 1.51%; field trips, 1.37%; and chorus, 1.00%.

As shown in Table 2, most participants perceived *speaking and conversation* to be the most preferred LLSP in the classroom. The interviews revealed that speaking is an enjoyable strategy for the results that it gives during and after practicing it. Participants also ascribed importance to *interaction with the teacher* as the second preferred, and to *reading aloud* as the third preferred LLSP. Participants also attributed importance to *grammar and writing*, especially when combined with *correcting sentences on the board*, a strategy that focuses on grammar and vocabulary (the combined total was 26.5%). It seems that participants tended to be more global, focusing more on the big picture—their final goal of communication. Strategies that do not appear to contribute directly to the development of communicative skills were not emphasized.

Interviews

All but one of the interviewees concurred that *speaking and conversation* is their first preferred strategy, as they prefer to be proactive in making the language more real, which boosts their language performance (see the Discussion section). Ten out of 15 interviewees chose *interaction with the teacher* as their second priority, explaining that it helped them understand how to use the language correctly outside the classroom. Ten out of 15 interviewees, however, did not choose *reading aloud* as one of the top three LLSPs. They chose instead strategies such as *grammar and writing*, *frontal teaching*, and *translation*.

In general, interviewees indicated two basic assumptions. The first was that learning a language at college would enable them to communicate with native speakers in the target-culture regions as well as at home: "I can use the language when I am in the Middle East or in North Africa" (male, third-year Arabic). "Spanish could be used in many countries but also here, in America. There are places where people do not understand or speak English, and the only way to communicate with them is through Spanish" (female, fourth-year Spanish). "I need Japanese to converse with tourists or students from Japan who come to America and who do not know English, or with family members who come and do not know English. This happened to me a couple of times" (male, second-year Japanese).

The second assumption was that language instructors knew their profession well and were able to teach the language in an appropriate manner for the participants to achieve the aforementioned goal: "If the professors were chosen by the college, I am sure they are good" (female, first-year German). "I have full confidence in my teachers. They are native speakers and know the language very well" (male, fourth-year Spanish). The interviews are further deliberated with regards to the results in the Discussion section.

Differences between the Two Groups

In order to compare Groups 1 and 2's LLSP preferences, the frequencies of the various strategies were computed as percentages. To identify statistically significant differences between the two groups, a two-sample *t* test was used. This statistical procedure assesses whether an observed difference between the means of two groups is *statistically* dependable and not one that might have happened by chance. To perform this procedure, each strategy was graded on a scale ranging from 0 to 3. The first-choice strategy scored the highest grade, 3; the second-choice strategy scored a grade of 2; the third-choice strategy scored a grade of 1; and a strategy not selected scored the lowest grade, 0.

Table 3
Differences in LLSPs Between Group 1 and Group 2 Participants Across Seven Languages in Percentages

		Group 1 (*N*=137)	Group2 (*N*=61)
1.	Checking homework in class	15.30	14.75
2.	Frontal teaching	9.90	9.85
3.	Reading aloud	16.80	21.30
4.	Listening	10.70	4.90
5.	Watching movies and video clips	11.45	8.20
6.	Working individually	7.65	11.50
7.	Translation from L1 to L2	15.00	6.55
8.	Translation from L2 to L1	12.80	8.20
9.	Spelling and dictation	10.70	4.90
10.	Correcting sentences on the board	14.50	14.75
11.	Speaking and conversation	62.00	75.40
12.	Interaction with the teacher	29.00	18.00
13.	Tests and quizzes	6.85	4.90
14.	Grammar and writing	14.60	8.20
15.	Group work	12.20	8.20
16.	Flashcards to learn vocabulary	20.60	21.30

Table 4
The t-test Results, Comparing Group 1 and Group 2 Participants Across Seven Languages on LLSP

Variable		Group1 (N=137)	Group 2 (N=61)	t-stat	t-crit	df	p
Checking homework in class	M	0.30	0.32	−0.15	1.98	114	0.88
	SD	0.81	0.87				
Frontal teaching	M	0.20	0.19	0.08	1.97	125	0.93
	SD	0.66	0.65				
Reading aloud	M	0.35	0.45	0.47	1.98	104	0.63
	SD	0.85	0.95				
Listening	M	0.18	0.14	0.47	1.98	118	0.63
	SD	0.58	0.57				
Watching movies and video clips	M	0.23	0.11	1.49	1.97	181	0.13
	SD	0.69	0.41				
Working individually	M	0.16	0.26	−0.83	1.98	98	0.40
	SD	0.63	0.77				
Translation from L1 to L2	M	0.32	0.14	1.72	1.97	156	0.08
	SD	0.83	0.60				
Translation from L2 to L1	M	0.27	0.14	1.36	1.97	157	0.17
	SD	0.75	0.54				
Spelling and dictation	M	0.21	0.11	1.15	1.97	137	0.25
	SD	0.66	0.55				
Correcting sentences on the board	M	0.27	0.42	−1.00	1.98	88	0.31
	SD	0.74	1.04				
Speaking and conversation	M	1.28	1.73	2.42	1.97	120	0.01*
	SD	1.20	1.15				
Interaction with the teacher	M	0.72	0.26	3.36	1.97	182	0.00**
	SD	1.20	0.70				
Tests and quizzes	M	0.10	0.08	0.41	1.97	127	0.68
	SD	0.46	0.42				
Grammar and writing	M	0.32	0.09	2.75	1.97	196	0.00**
	SD	0.78	0.35				
Group work	M	0.21	0.19	0.21	1.98	106	0.83
	SD	0.63	0.70				
Flashcards to learn vocabulary	M	0.39	0.31	0.72	1.97	138	0.47
	SD	0.84	0.69				

M = mean; SD = standard deviation.
*p < .05. (Confidence intervals: 95%)
**p < .01.   (Confidence intervals: 99%)

A brief glance at Tables 3 and 4 reveals that Group 1 and Group 2 participants varied significantly from each other with regard to the top three LLSPs. Whereas Group 2 attributed preference to *speaking and conversation,* with $t(120) = 2.42$, $p = .01$, Group 1 attributed preference to *interaction with the teacher,* with $t(182) = 3.36$, $p = .00$, and *grammar and writing,* with $t(196) = 2.75$, $p = .00$. The findings suggest some interesting trends between the two groups and a shift in LLSP based on the learning experience of participants. Whereas Group 1 participants put more emphasis on *interaction with the teacher*, *grammar and writing*, *spelling and dictation*, and *translation*, Group 2 participants emphasized *speaking and conversation* and *reading aloud.* Another interesting tendency is that whereas Group 1 participants leaned toward *group work*, Group 2 participants preferred *working individually*. Regarding other strategies such as *flashcards* and *correcting sentences on the board*, a large degree of symmetry was found between the two groups.

DISCUSSION

It may have been more meaningful to draw inferences from the results if the survey questionnaire had been designed to provide information about how a strategy preference is influenced by specific L2 learning tasks that participants faced. Such a design is complex in nature, however, because it is almost impossible to ask respondents to explain their strategy preferences across the unlimited possibilities of language-learning tasks. Another limitation of the survey questionnaire is that it could not provide information about the motivation for preferring one strategy over another. To compensate for these limitations, semi-structured interviews with some participants were conducted.

LLSPs

Speaking and Conversation

Participants clearly valued the ability to use the language for oral communication. They believed that they would have a better grasp on the language if they could speak and produce it themselves: "When speaking, I pursue my own ideas and form my own sentences and ways of delivering them" (female, third-year German). Interacting face-to-face with native speakers fulfills participants' human nature of socializing and gives them self-confidence and a sense of achievement: "If you cannot communicate with other people, what is the point of learning the language? Speaking with people is the basis of the language, and for me it is the most useful skill… I need it for survival—for

example, asking for directions, or asking where the bathroom is, or asking where the hospital is. It is a practical skill" (male, second-year Russian).

Such responses can explain the choice of the three LLSPs: *speaking and conversation*, *interaction with the teacher*, and *reading aloud*. These strategies supplement one another and stem from students' interest in developing oral communicative skills. By choosing them, participants emphasized the power of experiential learning and academic risk taking. They also indicated that active learning strategies could maximize their involvement and enable them to test the effectiveness of using the language for communicative purposes: "It is one thing to be able to understand and to read and to take in the language, but to come up with something original in your own head and then to produce it yourself is a totally different thing. My goal is to be able to say sentences that I have never heard before and express new ideas. It is hard to get to this point if we do not have the confidence to do it, and such a confidence is gained through speaking a lot in the classroom" (female, third-year Arabic).

It should be noted, though, that the selection of these three strategies as the preferred ones does not mean that participants employ them the most, or that other strategies, such as *grammar and writing*, *listening*, and *translation,* are not meaningful for them as well. When asked why priority was given to the *speaking and conversation* strategy over others, interviewees emphasized the importance of being able to speak the language: "For me, listening, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are all components of speaking. In trying to say something, I have to think about the words, where to put them, and how to pronounce them" (female, second-year Russian). "Speaking helps me make sentences on the spot and practice putting sounds and words together. It is very important for me to have a rhythmic flow with the language so that I can interact with native speakers. I feel competent when I can speak" (male, third-year French). Participants believed that through active use of the language, they could pick up grammatical structures and vocabulary, even if they were not fully aware of how and why everything fit together, and thus they could develop communicative proficiency: "I know that I am not perfect in speaking the language, but I don't want to wait until I am perfect. I feel that the more I practice speaking the more confidence I get with regard to grammar and vocabulary" (female, third-year Arabic); "For me, it happens many times that I know what I want to say, but I can't say it properly. I need to speak more so I can use grammatical structures and vocabulary automatically without thinking about them" (male, third-year Japanese).

Participants were aware, though, that using the language for communication requires a combination of learning strategies (Hagino, 2002; Weaver & Cohen, 1994) to ensure the necessary knowledge to achieve the goal: "It is not enough for me to focus only on speaking when I learn the language. I also need to know how to pronounce and write the words and how to put them into meaningful sentences" (female, third-year Chinese).

Interaction with the Teacher

Participants perceived this strategy as vital for the learning process as they professed the need for corrective feedback in the classroom. For them, *interaction with the teacher* is another means to prepare themselves for speaking. They believed that oral correction provided by the instructor could build confidence and enable deeper learning: "As a language student, I often find myself worrying too much about making mistakes and having to be corrected by the professor. When I am worried about making mistakes, I am usually worried about my grade as well, and whether the professor will think less of me because of my mistakes. On the other hand, however, I have found that I have learned the most from being corrected in the classroom. Making mistakes and receiving feedback is as important as homework and other language-speaking exercises" (male, third-year French). Empirical evidence suggests that, although students might think that they learn the most from being corrected, this is not often the case (See e.g., Tedick and de Gortari, 1998). "When I interact with someone who knows the language well, I know I am going to be corrected. I have confidence that the teacher can help me out with what I want to say and can make me better through coherent and effective conversation. Speaking with the teacher is speaking with guidance" (female, first-year Spanish). "When I interact with my peers, I hear only things that we all know, and I am not aware of mistakes, but when I interact with the teacher, he uses the language in a way that is challenging. He uses phrases that I don't know, and it makes me think and pick up new words and phrases. And I also hear the right pronunciation" (female, second-year Japanese). Still another participant (male, second-year French) added, "Whenever I say a word wrong and get corrected on it, I am way less likely to say that word wrong again."

Furthermore, participants believed that it is safe to practice with the instructor, who has patience, is not annoyed by learners' mistakes, and wants the learners to succeed. This explains why participants value individual feedback given by the instructor during class, for conversation, answering questions, or writing and correcting sentences on the board: "I like my professor, because she always corrects me with a smile on her face. She sometimes asks me to correct my own mistakes, and it takes time, but she has patience" (female, second-year Russian). "I do like to write sentences on the board and to get feedback from the professor, even if he sometimes makes fun of my mistakes" (male, first-year Arabic).

Indeed, this strategy encompasses oral feedback given by the instructor in the classroom, which is a significant issue in L2 teaching and learning; however, the scope of this article does not allow an in-depth examination (for more details on feedback see Ellis, 2009; Loewen, 2012).

Reading Aloud

Before discussing this strategy, it should be noted that the seven languages investigated have very different orthographies. Arabic, for example, has shallow orthography (correspondences between letters and sounds—graphemes/phonemes in the writing system are close to one-to-one), whereas French has deep orthography. Such differences can affect the extent to which *reading aloud* in a specific language is comprehensible to a native speaker of that language.

The selection of *reading aloud* (to oneself) as one of the top three LLSPs is a surprising yet interesting finding. Whereas reading aloud to children is important for the development of literacy skills (Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Trelease, 2013), reading aloud to oneself is not necessarily considered a pedagogically effective technique in learning a second language, and it is hardly mentioned in the literature. One article, however, cites interviews with high-school students studying French and Spanish conducted by Papalia and Zampogna (in Oxford & Crookall, 1989). These interviews showed that the *reading aloud* strategy helped students in reading comprehension. In the present study, interviews revealed that participants perceived this strategy effective not necessarily for text comprehension, but mainly for specific purposes such as practicing and activation of orthographic knowledge, sound correspondences, pronunciation, and intonation: "For me reading aloud is learning by doing. I see the letters, and I sound them. It is good practice. It also helps me improve my pronunciation and fluency. I want to be able to speak with other people, and reading aloud gives me the confidence to do that, and also to express my ideas verbally in class discussions" (male, third-year German).

The participants perceived *reading aloud* as a preparatory step in achieving communicative proficiency, especially when it is done in the classroom with immediate instructor feedback. They realized that one cannot communicate effectively if meaning is masked by incorrect pronunciation, rhythm, stress, and intonation: "By reading out loud, I practice the rhythm of the language without having to worry about words and grammar. I understand where the short and the long vowels go and how they are linked to speaking, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. It is a kind of pre-speaking activity. It is the halfway point between taking in the language and reproducing it" (male, second-year Arabic). "Even though I don't usually read aloud—and at times, reading aloud in front of the class could be a stressful experience for me—I understand that when learning a new language, such practice is beneficial. It gives me the speaking practice without the added pressure of: 'Did I create that correctly?' It is more of: 'Can I read that correctly?'" (female, third-year German). "When I read out loud, I get to hear how it sounds and to make corrections with the help of the teacher, if needed" (male, second-year Japanese).

In using this strategy, students skim through sentences, practice strings of sounds, and put those strings into words and expressions. Thus, students

become more confident and comfortable in making the sounds and with how the words feel coming out of their mouths: "When I read aloud, I am mentally making the words in my head and forming the connection between my mind and my mouth. This is a very important practice for me" (male, third-year Chinese).

Six interviewees expressed contradictory views—for example, *reading aloud*, boring and a waste of time, does not facilitate text comprehension or sentence formation: "Just because you read a text out loud does not always mean that you understand it. When I read a text out loud, I focus on reading rather than on understanding what it says" (female, second-year Russian). "I hate reading out loud. I am not good at it. Maybe it is important, but I hate it. In my opinion, it is a waste of time" (male, second-year Arabic). "My professor is smart. She does not ask the students to read out loud. She understands that it is boring and not helpful" (female, second-year Spanish). "Reading aloud is more useful in an elementary-school setting to help with fluency but not with students at the college level" (male, third-year German). Such views may point to participants' perception that using *reading aloud* to enhance text comprehension or the speaking skill does not necessarily produce the expected results. For them *reading aloud* could be effective if it focuses only on improving pronunciation and intonation rather than on text comprehension. *Reading aloud* is a tool that instructors should use with caution.

Implications

Students, linguistically and culturally diverse, vary in their perceptual learning strategies and preferences regarding modes of learning. Because our understanding of cognitive processes and learning is relatively limited, the results of this study may indicate only a goal-oriented behavior regarding LLSPs. Nevertheless, the results might lead to a more effective use of class time and provide guidance to teachers about how to better align teaching/learning goals with language learning strategies, thus improving students' learning. It should be noted, though, that there is no consensus among scholars as to whether or not compatibility between learning and teaching strategies can maximize one's capability to be a more effective learner. Some argue that such compatibility can lead to effective impact on learning, whereas some have challenged and questioned it due to a lack of empirical validation, and still others have highlighted possible advantages of mismatch between teaching and learning strategies (Cohen, 2012; Dörnyei, 2009; Oxford, 2011; Pashler, et al., 2008). Though strategies have been extensively studied and discussed, the two conflicting views are still in contention, without clear data that can support one standpoint over the other (Kamińska, 2014).

The main finding of this study is that college-level students concentrate on strategies that may move them toward the goal of learning a language: speaking for communication. They want to develop proficiency to the level where they may communicate even without mastery of grammar; speaking is thus perceived as a practical application of the language. It is evident that in any

educational environment, some students learn more than others. Every instructor has encountered students who learn in unanticipated ways (Pashler et al., 2008). Because teaching is not the same as learning, from the same teaching activity students learn various things and progress differently. A language instructor may feel more comfortable teaching in a specific manner, but this may leave some students behind. Thus, familiarity with students' strengths and weaknesses, particularly how a student would be most receptive to teaching, will assist instructors to design a methodology pertinent to students' expectations for interpersonal communication. Research indicates that a teaching strategy that matches or addresses a student's learning strategy to a reasonable degree can result in higher learning quality, motivation to learn the language, feelings of independence, and confidence in one's abilities to succeed (Oxford, 2003).

Participants' preference for speaking makes it clear that teaching strategies should provide students with ample opportunities to use the language and be proactive. When instruction offers various venues to use the language orally, in a mode that aligns with students' strategies, it enables students to prioritize the materials being taught, have a clear idea of where the instructor is heading, and know what to expect from the lesson. Such instruction may create an effective and engaging learning environment, increasing students' motivation and generating personal commitment and confidence to succeed in learning the language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Assessment should also take place in a way to ascertain whether or not the desired objectives have been obtained. In other words, learning strategies, teaching strategies, and assessment need to be closely aligned to reinforce one another. Responding to continuing assessment data, instructors may adjust teaching strategies to ensure effective use of class time.

The findings of Group 1's participants valuing the instructor's input indicate the instructor' influence on the participants' learning process, perhaps more than the instructors realize. Such an influence should be used to empower and motivate students to study the language in and out of the classroom. On the other hand, Group 2's participants preferred less dependence on the instructor and more autonomous in learning (See Weaver & Cohen 1994, Oxford 1990a). This emphasizes the role of instructors as facilitators who assist students to become more autonomous by providing them with the tools to make sound pedagogical decisions regarding learning and to use appropriate language learning strategies. In this way, instructors may raise students' awareness of the learning process (Weaver & Cohen, 1994).

Participants indicated that they could also benefit from teaching methodologies that do not necessarily accommodate their LLSP: "It forces you out of your comfort zone. Anything you do to learn the language is good, even if it is not necessarily something that you enjoy doing" (female, second-year French). "At first I did not like listening—when the teacher just plays a clip and we have to write down what we heard and then answer questions. I did not really like it at the beginning, because it was really hard to keep up, and they were speaking so fast. But I got better at it over time. I practiced it more, and I

actually enjoy the listening now. I think everybody is resistant to try new things at the beginning, but once you get used to it, it makes you stronger in that area. Those different strategies help you in different ways in using the language and can make you better" (female, third-year Arabic). Exposure to various teaching methods revitalizes students' attention, forces them to acclimate themselves to teaching strategies beyond their comfort zone, and enables them to benefit from these teaching strategies. This exposure also enables students to realize their strengths and weaknesses and to develop a broad range of learning skills. They also realize that there is no learning-strategy recipe for all—learners differ from one another. Moreover, a learner does not use the same learning strategies all the time. Whereas learning one aspect of language (such as listening, vocabulary or grammar) may be easy for a student, other aspects may be much harder. Although some learners adjust their learning strategies quickly, others take a long time. Understanding individual patterns and variability may lead educators to developing new effective interventions and allow for matches between learners and teachers.

Future Research

The empirical evidence provided by this study may have implications for theoretical models of effective language instruction, language teacher education programs, and language curriculum development. Further research on LLSPs is needed so that we may better understand how students discover, choose, and use learning strategies. Empirical data are needed on questions such as: What are students' LLSPs and what principles and phenomena underlie the preferences? As the seven languages included in this study vary in terms of difficulty, what are the LLSPs in each language, and does learning experience make a difference? Are students actually using the strategies they self-report as their preferences? In what ways and to what extent does an LLSP impact the learning process? More specifically, how does using a given LLSP enhance a student's learning experiences and lead to the development of language proficiency? In addition, instructors' language-teaching strategy preferences should also be investigated to reveal the extent to which they correspond with students' LLSPs.

SUMMARY

The findings indicate that language students tend to adopt a holistic view of the learning task and relate it to real-life and personal experience. They favor application-directed learning strategies that aim at establishing concrete processing and ultimately utilizing knowledge beyond the classroom. Students prefer to be proactive in order to make the language real, to boost performance, and to develop language skills that will last a lifetime. Insights into students' LLSPs can help instructors find a balance between teaching and learning strategies and adapt a multifaceted view of instruction responsive to students'

learning styles, needs, and interests. The application of diversified channels through which information streams in the L2 classroom, combined with an ongoing assessment, may help students select and process information and increase the chance of success. By providing guidance to students about the suitability of strategies for the learning task and the content being studied, instructors may deepen students' awareness of how a foreign language is learned, challenge them academically, and develop their ultimate language proficiency.

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AUTHOR

Hezi Brosh, *Ph.D., Associate Professor, Languages and Cultures Department, United States Naval Academy.*

Second Language Acquisition: Predicting Less Commonly Taught Languages Learning Success

HANING HUGHES
United States Air Force Academy

Students at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) are required to study a foreign language. In order to place students into appropriate language courses, especially less commonly taught languages defined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), effective language placement policies are essential. The author examines the USAFA's current language placement policy, which includes measures for general intelligence and student language choice. Alternative language placement policy models are proposed with an added motivation measurement to the existing instrument. This study employs binary logistic regression to examine the existing language placement policy model and two proposed models, to determine whether a more effective predictor of foreign language learning success can be identified. The placement of the Class of 2017 into Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian language courses was reviewed. The effect of students' academic composite scores, first choice language, and motivation on language placement was assessed. The most effective placement model—categorizing the largest percentage of students into less commonly taught languages and European languages—included a measurement of foreign language motivation and student language choice. The inclusion of the two variables is solidly grounded in current second language acquisition research.

Keywords: *motivation, language, placement, culture, learning, acquisition*

> "Who does not know another language does not know his
> own (van der Auwera, 1970).
>
> > – Goethe

INTRODUCTION

Modern communication and transportation technologies have made the world a smaller place, but they have also made the many differences in language and culture that have contributed to a more volatile international environment more apparent. This volatility is not only indicated by increased military conflict, but also by the way individuals interact as global citizens across an entire spectrum of social, economic, and political concerns. From a national perspective, concerns over cooperation and conflict with foreign governments have prompted efforts to enhance understanding of different cultures and languages, and have resulted in previous cycles of language interest and intensity (Snyder, Akin, Spratt, Bartlett, Sanchez, & Jones, 2008).

Although frequently confined to government organizations and the Department of Defense (DoD), the cycles of increased attention to foreign languages have been related to conflicts such as World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War, the Vietnam War and, more recently, Operations Desert Storm in Iraq and Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Since the 1990s, the United States government and its DoD have had to adjust to asymmetrical combat operations, facing ill-defined opponents in locations far from their personnel's familiar customs, languages, and locations of Western Europe. This has led to the gradual awareness that the government and military establishment were inadequately prepared, from a language and culture perspective, to conduct humanitarian, security, peace-keeping, and anti-terrorism missions in hostile environments. In 2006, The Department of Defense stated the following in its Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR):

> Developing broader linguistic capability and cultural understanding is … critical to prevail in the long war and meet 21st Century challenges. The Department must dramatically increase the number of personnel proficient in key languages … and make these languages available at all levels of action and decision (Rumsfeld, 2006, p. 78).

Under the auspices of the Departments of State, Education, the Defense, and the Air Force, defense policies are changing, and new language and cultural learning mandates are emerging. The DoD and the military services have recognized the need to develop more robust sets of linguistic, regional, and cultural competencies. As a result, the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) has significantly expanded its foreign language teaching capabilities and emphasized placing students in the proper languages to maximize foreign language learning/acquisition potential.

To date, there has been little substantive research or evaluation assessing the effectiveness of the USAFA's foreign language placement

policies. Complicating the matter is the sobering reality that some students are incapable of acquiring a second language. This is problematic for producing linguists in less commonly taught languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese or Russian (Galbraith & Gardner, 1988; Grigorenko, 2007).

At the USAFA, students face significant pressure (both positive and negative) to do well (C or above) in language courses. If one receives a deficient grade (C- or below), the student will not receive course credit toward a foreign language minor. Moreover, the student will be ineligible to participate in the USAFA's official overseas language and cultural immersion programs. The same student may also face academic probation, which carries further restrictions.

All students are allowed to choose up to three languages for consideration in the placement process, one of which must be strategic—Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, or Russian. These are then compared with academic achievements in high school and standardized college entrance examination scores. Academic achievements are defined as an Academic Composite Score (ACCOMP), which is developed using a complex formula derived from a student's high school cumulative GPA, verbal, math, and combined SAT/ACT scores, as well as the rated difficulty level of the student's high school. Unless a student with a high ACCOMP has had significant prior experience in French, German, Portuguese, or Spanish, he or she is generally assigned to Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, or Russian.

The USAFA foreign languages department makes a significant effort to ensure uniform teaching quality standards. Each foreign language division is required to incorporate the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL) World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, provide the same number of classroom contact hours, develop uniform assessment instruments, and follow strict grading guidelines to ensure that students are treated fairly. Nevertheless, it was not possible to control every environmental, pedagogical, or instructional variable among the various foreign languages in this study.

Figure 1 displays the final grades of first-year students in strategic (less commonly taught) languages from 2009-2012. In this category, the university's Arabic program experienced a 14.8% student grade deficiency rate (<2.00 GPA) over the four-year period, whereas the student grade deficiency rate was 11.4% for Chinese, 16.0% for Japanese, and 9.0% for Russian. Overall, the academy's strategic languages deficiency rate for the four-year period was 13.6%.
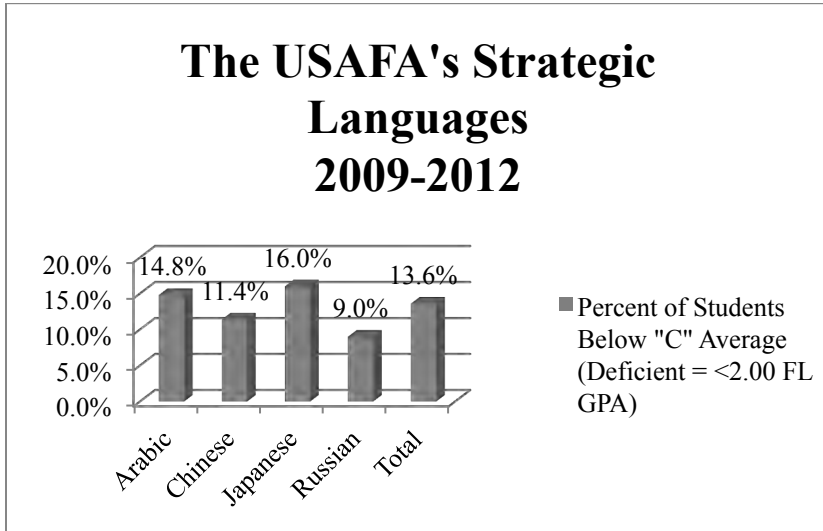
The USAFA's Strategic Languages 2009-2012

Figure 1

The USAFA's Strategic Languages 2009-2012 Percent of Students with a Below "C" Average (Deficient = <2.00)

Figure 2 (below) differs from Figure 1 in that it displays the final grades of first-year students who studied strategic languages from 2009-2012 and earned less than a "B" (3.00 GPA) average. Although a "B" average is not considered deficient, the author established it as the minimum standard for a student to be identified as a successful language learner. The USAFA's Arabic program reported that 45.1% of the students earned less than a B average, whereas those taking Chinese, Japanese and Russian earned 50.8%, 44.3%, and 37.8%, respectively. Overall, 44.4% of the academy's less commonly taught language students earned less than a B average over the four-year period.
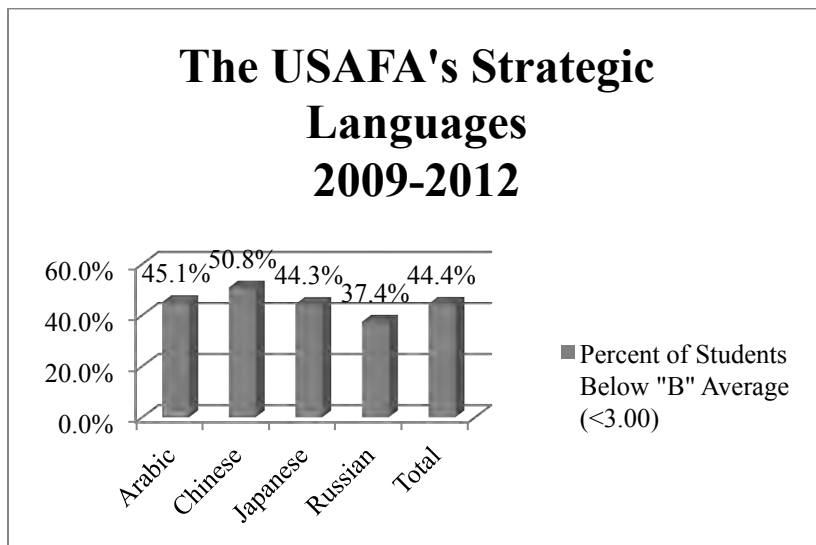
Figure 2
The USAFA's Strategic Languages 2009-2012 Percent of Students Below "B" Average (<3.00)

This foreign language placement policy study seeks to understand how to predict students' language acquisition success before they begin to study a foreign language. An effective placement policy should assign students to the right language and at the right level for optimal learning success. Figures 1 and 2, however, indicate that almost half of the students in less commonly taught language courses were not successful. In fact, nearly 14% were unable to earn a "C" average, resulting in potential "academic probation" and disenrollment. Given the USAFA's stringent academic admission standards, the results suggest that a placement policy based on prior academic achievements may not be effective.

The following questions prompted this study: What elements contribute to successful second language acquisition? Is there a valid language aptitude assessment instrument? Do the SAT and/or other cognitive academic achievement scores predict language learning aptitude? Does motivation influence second language acquisition? Is motivation a significant factor in an effective language placement policy?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning Aptitude

Second language acquisition research indicates that efficient foreign language instruction requires an understanding of the individual differences

among language learners. These are aptitude, age, gender, attitude toward language learning, motivation, language acquisition styles and strategies, and risk-taking, among others (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Griffiths, 2015; Ortega, 2014).

Many studies argue that aptitude is a valid component of language learning that should be taken into account in foreign language instruction (Carroll & Sapon, 1959; Gardner & Lysynchuk, 1990; Pimsleur, 1966; Skehan, 2002). Skehan (1999) suggests that aptitude is "a talent for learning languages that is independent of intelligence" (p. 276). Alexiou (2009) expands on Carroll's (1971) rate of acquisition definition and defines aptitude as the natural ability to learn foreign languages quickly and easily, without respect to motivation, instructional methods, learning environment, or other factors.

Ehrman and Oxford (1995) conducted a study of the relationships of a range of individual difference variables in second language learning success. The study determined that cognitive aptitude had the strongest correlation to end-of-program language learning success, and other individual variables—motivation and self-confidence—also had strong correlations. Stansfield and Winke (2008) state that language aptitude alone is insufficient to predict second language acquisition in a classroom environment. "It has been shown time and time again that another factor contributing to L2 success is motivation, which can override the effect of aptitude" (p. 83). The implication is that although high aptitude may not necessarily result in higher motivation, high motivation is more likely to result in a greater variety of strategies and more time on task, which dovetails with the second language learner's existing aptitude and maximizes the learner's potential (Stansfield & Winke, 2008, p. 83).

Aptitude Assessment

There are several theories and tests that measure foreign language (FL) learning ability. Among these are the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll & Sapon, 1959), the Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB) (Petersen & Al-Haik, 1976), the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB) (Pimsleur, 1966), and the VORD, which means "word" in the artificial language on which the test was based (Parry & Stansfield, 1990). In general, these tests emerged from the tradition of psychometric test development and are empirically based, English-language rooted, and used as predictors (Grigorenko, 2007). Research on the effect of language learning aptitude has focused primarily on the MLAT (Carroll & Sapon, 1959), developed as part of the Harvard Language Aptitude Project. Carroll and Sapon (1959) theorized various potential language aptitude measures that resulted in the identification of seven components of language aptitude. The components were later measured by the MLAT (Silva & White, 1993).

MLAT

The MLAT, developed as a model derived from the results of factor analyses of many characteristics thought to contribute to foreign language learning, was meant to assess the aptitude of adults and high school students learning a second language in a classroom environment (Reed & Stansfield, 2002). It addresses two types of learning abilities: 1) fluid abilities necessary for solving unfamiliar problems and adjusting rapidly to new situations; and 2) crystallized abilities, which are acquired skills such as first language vocabulary (Ehrman et al., 2003). The MLAT analytical process describes 1) phonetic coding ability (auditory capacity and sound-symbol relations); 2) grammatical sensitivity; 3) inductive language learning; and 4) memory. Three of these capacities—auditory symbolic, and grammatical are common to both the MLAT and the PLAB (Grigorenko, 2007).

Although the MLAT is widely used, including administration by the U.S. Military Academy, some researchers have questioned its effectiveness. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013) suggest that other linguistic researchers have criticized the MLAT primarily because Carroll and Sapon (1959) considered aptitude to apply only to classroom instruction and learning. Krashen (1981), the MLAT's primary challenger, believes that its inductive and grammatical sensitivity constructs relate only to conscious language learning and not to second language acquisition. Robinson (2012) finds that the "Word in Sentences" section of the MLAT correlates primarily with implicit (unconscious) learning. Another shortcoming of the MLAT, according to Anselmo (1993), is that it does not consider motivation in second language acquisition.

DLAB

Following the development of the MLAT, the DoD initiated the development of its own language aptitude measure, the DLAB (Petersen & Al-Haik, 1976). Silva and White (1993) described the development of the DLAB:

> After World War II, the armed services recognized the need for soldiers capable of speaking foreign languages. Today, a number of military occupational specialties require intense use of foreign language and others require foreign languages, but to a lesser extent. Based on this need, selection efforts for foreign language specialties led to the development of paper-and pencil tests that emphasize the structural aspects of learning language. This approach was appropriate and effective given that the primary goal of language training at that time was to translate the written word, not to speak or to listen to the language. (p. 1)

However, aptitude tests were highly correlated with general intelligence (Carroll & Sapon, 1959), and subsequently, were redundant with other assessment instruments in use. Furthermore, the armed services language

training became more audio-lingual (focusing on listening and speaking), but the assessment instruments were not designed to predict this criterion (Silva & White, 1993). As a result, the military commissioned a research effort in the 1950s to develop an appropriate language aptitude test capable of predicting audio-lingual success. Thus, the DLAB, developed by Peterson and Al-Haik (1976), was expected to at least match the validity of existing audio-lingually-focused commercial tests, such as the MLAT, and make the process easier to administer, score, and interpret.

The ability to make inferences regarding the structure of an artificial language is the central ability measured by the DLAB (Petersen & Al-Haik, 1976). The DLAB consists primarily of inductive reasoning items that utilize a modified version of English. The test includes items that quantify examinees' ability to form language concepts from pictures, learn foreign language sounds (via utterance identification, recognition of vowel patterns, and recognition of stress patterns), and master foreign language sound-symbol association and grammar (Grigorenko, 2007).

Critics, however, frequently question these aptitude measures because of their reliance on very structured analytical skills at variance with less structured, highly communicative language teaching techniques (Ehrman et al., 2003), and their strong correlation to general intelligence factors (Parry & Stansfield, 1990), although few language experts are willing to eliminate such measures entirely.

New Directions in Language Aptitude Assessment

Stansfield (1989) reports that a conference sponsored by the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics and the U.S. Government's Interagency Language Roundtable was held in Washington, DC in September 1988. Its primary agenda was to discuss aptitude testing's ability to predict second language acquisition success. It was noted that aptitude tests developed in the 1960s and 1970s had several perceived shortcomings. Stansfield (1989) points out that they

> do not take into account new insights, revealed by the works of cognitive psychologists, on the human learning process in general and on the language learning process in particular. Nor do they take into account the work of social psychologists who have studied the relation of attitudes, motivation, personality, and other emotional characteristics and predispositions to second language learning. Nor do they take into account the work of educational psychologists who have identified variables such as individual cognitive styles, personal learning strategies, and brain hemisphericity that also seem to be related to successful language learning. These learner variables might be affected by other factors: personal characteristics of the teacher; the instructional method employed; the task or language skill to be learned;

the classroom environment in which the learning takes place; and the proficiency level that needs to be acquired (pp. 3-4).

Government and education leaders participating in the conference suggested that all of these variables should be reexamined either to revalidate current assessment instruments or to develop others. Stansfield (1989) advocates that a "new program of language aptitude research, test development, and data collection and analysis might improve our ability to predict successful language learning and to tailor the classroom environment and instruction to individual students" (p. 4).

In response to the conference invitation, researchers, such as Ehrman et al., (2003), Lett et al., (2003), and Robinson (2012), initiated new research to evaluate whether the concept of language aptitude needs to be expanded to relate to factors other than those associated with a specific language learner. Parry and Stansfield (1990) suggest that a revised definition of language aptitude might extend beyond specific cognitive variables to include many other variables relevant to foreign language acquisition success.

Language Learning Motivation

Foreign language acquisition researchers have argued that motivation, in addition to aptitude, is critical for language learning success (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Parry & Stansfield, 1990; Robinson, 2012; Stansfield & Winke, 2008). Ushioda (2008) suggests that "good language learners are motivated. Common sense and everyday experience suggest that the high achievers in this world have motivation" (p. 19). Motivation may then be defined as an influence that stimulates an individual to make specific choices, take specific actions, and persist in that action (Ushioda, 2008). Motivation is considered one of the primary factors in successful second language acquisition. "Motivation determines the extent of active, personal involvement in L2 learning" (Oxford & Shearin, 1994, p. 12). Success in any field is difficult to achieve without motivation, and this may be particularly true in second language acquisition (Ushioda, 2008).

Dornyei and Ushioda (2013) argue that motivation is one of the primary components of successful second language acquisition. Ushioda (2008) proposes that intrinsic motivation, or the idea of learning something simply for the pleasure, excitement, or challenge derived from doing so, is the optimal form of motivation. Extrinsic motivation differs in that it is focused on learning something for a benefit to be derived later, such as getting a job, earning a grade, or avoiding punishment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Griffiths (2015) suggests that intrinsic motivation generates more effective learning. Ushioda (2008) notes that the advantage of intrinsic motivation may be because "intrinsically motivated learners are deeply concerned to learn things well, in a manner that is intrinsically satisfying and that arouses a sense of optimal challenge appropriate to their current level of skill and competence" (p. 21). Be it intrinsic or extrinsic, it is important that the learner either internalizes the motivation or relies on

influences such as parents, teachers, or societal regulations to drive the learning process.

METHODOLOGY

Assessing the USAFA's foreign language placement policy, the author analyzed three policy models to identify the most effective one. The two proposed alternative models address 1) motivation (as measured by language choice and a foreign language motivation instrument); and 2) aptitude (as measured by composite academic scores). As both are critical components of second language acquisition, the following models were examined and analyzed:

Model I: The Existing Language Placement Policy Model

Model I evaluates the statistical significance of academic composite scores and student language choice in the placement process to determine whether the model is effective in classifying students into less commonly taught language programs. Student language choice is considered only when established minimum academic composite guidelines have been met.

Model II: The Foreign Language Motivation Model

Model II evaluates the statistical significance of the foreign language motivation instrument and student language choice to determine whether the model is effective in classifying students into the less commonly taught language programs.

Model III: The Aptitude/Motivation Policy Model

Model III evaluates the statistical significance of academic composite scores, foreign language motivation, and student language choice to determine whether the model is effective in assigning students to less commonly taught language programs.
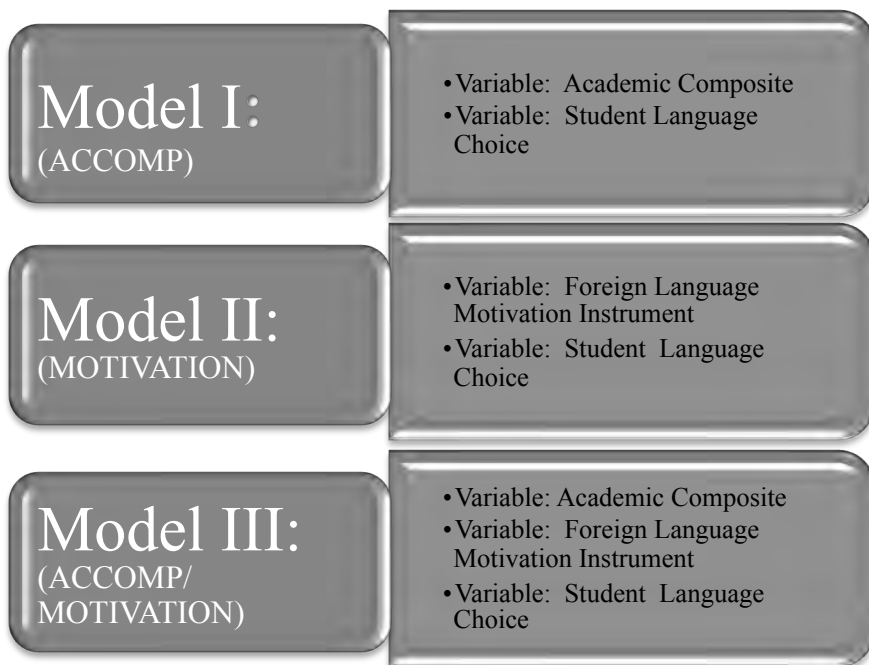
Model I: (ACCOMP)	• Variable: Academic Composite • Variable: Student Language Choice
Model II: (MOTIVATION)	• Variable: Foreign Language Motivation Instrument • Variable: Student Language Choice
Model III: (ACCOMP/ MOTIVATION)	• Variable: Academic Composite • Variable: Foreign Language Motivation Instrument • Variable: Student Language Choice

Figure 3
Language Placement Models

Variables

Academic Composite Score

The primary filter to determine if a student is qualified for the more difficult languages is an algorithmic formula known as the Academic Composite Score (ACCOMP*)*. It is also a primary consideration for admitting students into the academy. Ranging from 2400-3900 points, the ACCOMP is purported to predict a student's performance at the Air Force Academy. A student with a score of 3500 and above is predicted to perform well, whereas a student with a score of 2800 and below is not expected to succeed in the USAFA's rigorous academic environment. By the same reasoning, the Department of Foreign Languages places students with a score of 3200 and above in one of the less commonly taught language programs.

Foreign Language Motivation Instrument

The author developed a concise language learning motivation assessment instrument modeled upon the work of Stanfield and Winke (2008)

and Gardner, Clement, Smythe, and Smythe (1985). This research is consistent with other studies that have demonstrated that proficiency in the second language is related to attitudinal and motivational indices (Gardner, Clement, Smythe, & Smythe, 1979; Gardner, Gliksman, & Smythe, 1978; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Following Gardner's (1985) suggestion, the author modified items and dimensions of learner motivation to reflect the new cultural context and the specific strategic languages at the USAFA—Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. The Item Response Theory (IRT) (van der Linden & Hambleton, 2013), which provides a framework for calculating the effectiveness of assessment function and individual assessment items, was used in developing the motivation instrument. The IRT is used in developing education tests, building a test items bank, and scoring instruments that measure ability, attitudes, or other variables. Unlike models that create measures to evaluate individual item responses, the IRT does not assume that each item is correspondingly difficult (Van Alphen, Halfens, Hasman, & Imbos, 1994). This distinguishes it from, for instance, the assumption in Likert scaling that "All items are assumed to be replications of each other or in other words items are considered to be parallel instruments" (p. 197). In contrast, the IRT treats the difficulty of each item as information when scaling items.

The Foreign Language Motivation Instrument (FLMI), a 13-item unidimensional and reliable instrument, was modified by the author to measure the single construct of motivation in learning a foreign language. The instrument was given to all incoming students in the Class of 2017 during the summer of 2012 for the initial foreign language placement into strategic languages (see Appendix). The results of Rasch modeling (Rasch, 1980) showed the instrument to have sound psychometric properties in measuring the single construct of motivation to study a foreign language.

Student Language Choice

Student language choice, an implicit component of language learning motivation, measures intrinsic (internal) motivation. As discussed in the literature (see Griffiths, 2015; Ushioda, 2008), intrinsic motivation generates a more effective type of learning than does extrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated learners may be more creative thinkers, using various problem solving techniques, displaying greater involvement in the learning process, and retaining knowledge longer than do extrinsically motivated counterparts (Griffiths, 2015). Therefore, student choice is an important aspect of motivation that should be evaluated in language placement models.

Participants

The motivation survey sample consisted of 328 students in the Air Force Academy's Class of 2017, who were placed into first year Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian classes using the existing foreign language

placement policy in the fall of 2012. Upon application to the academy, the 1,111 students in the Class of 2017 were assigned an academic composite score. They were also required to respond to a survey listing their three language choices in order of desirability, as well as complete a foreign language learning motivation survey. The language placement assigned 75 students to Arabic, 73 to Chinese, 58 to Japanese, and 122 to Russian. The remaining 783 were assigned to European Languages (French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish).

Data Analysis

T-tests

Two t-tests were performed using person logit scores as the outcome variable to compare students' preference to be placed and actual placement in either a less commonly taught language or a European language. As Rasch modeling is a nonlinear analysis, person logit scores are used instead of raw scores. Both tests revealed statistically significant differences in performance on the motivation survey: those preferring placement and those placed in a strategic language expressed higher motivation for learning a foreign language. The results showed that, unlike the ACCOMP scores, the FLMI was able to distinguish between a desire to study a strategic language and placement in the language.

Correlation

Given the results, it was theorized that if the current process for placement were sufficient, a high correlation should have existed between the FMLI logit scores and ACCOMP scores; however, the results did not show a correlation ($r = .026$). This suggests that the added FLMI scores may enhance the placement process as students who prefer placement in a strategic language show higher motivation to learn a foreign language.

Logistic Regressions

Binary logistic regression was used to analyze the models. Like Rasch modeling, logistic regression is also a nonlinear analysis, frequently employed by researchers to classify or predict group membership. Logistic regression is a statistical process to determine membership in the less commonly taught languages for the proposed motivation model. The impact is expressed in terms of odds ratios (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). A logistic regression shows the prediction of a model with or without the presence of the predictor variable. Percentages of correct predictions are given for each predictor variable and for the overall predictive strength of the model. The value of the predictor variables is interpreted in how well the model is able to assign cases to groups—not just in the overall increase of percentage but also in the increases of assignment by

the individual predictor variables. For this study, a person logit cut-off variable was created to reflect those in the 60th percentile or above, mirroring the ACCOMP cut-off score of 3200. Placement in strategic or European language programs was the outcome variable.

RESULTS

Model 1: ACCOMP Cutoff Scores as Predictors of Placement (currently used)

No difference was found between the null model and the model with ACCOMP scores. No assignment to less commonly taught or European language was evident; the overall model prediction percentage remained constant at 55.2%, with the null and the model with ACCOMP scores classifying every case for placement into European languages. This finding suggests that ACCOMP alone is not a useful predictor.

Model 2: Person Logit Cutoff Scores as Predictors of Placement

The overall prediction rate was 56.4%. However, the person logit score classified 62.7% of those placed in European languages and 48.8% of those placed in the less commonly taught languages. This suggests that using the FLMI alone demonstrates more accuracy in language placement than does the ACCOMP alone.

Model 3: ACCOMP and Person Logit Cutoff Scores as Predictors of Placement

The model incorporated both the ACCOMP and person logit cutoff scores. The overall prediction rate increased to 57.3%. However, predictions of placement in the European language programs were 78. 2% and those in the less commonly taught language were 21.6%. This finding suggests that the ACCOMP does not enhance the prediction for student placement into less commonly taught language programs, probably because many students placed in the European languages had ACCOMP scores of 3200 or above (246 of 783 or 31.4%). In other words, too much variance is present to expect the ACCOMP scores to be relied upon as sole predictors.

DISCUSSION

Aptitude

The research questions addressed whether the USAFA's existing language placement policy effectively predicted success in learning a less commonly taught language. The findings demonstrated that it did not.

Furthermore, although Stern's (1970) psycho-linguistic theory, Spolsky's (1989) General Language theory, and DeKeyser (2007) suggest that first language learning ability directly impacts second language learning, the findings suggest that the general intelligence measure (ACCOMP) actually has little predictive value on individual second language learning success. The ACCOMP is used as the primary criterion for placing students in strategic language programs, but language researchers (Ehrman et al., 2003; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Grigorenko, 2007) have long contended that second language acquisition aptitude is an aptitude distinct from general intelligence.

Brown's (2009) study of the impact of the ACCOMP on overall GPA for the USAFA's class of 2010 shows that higher ACCOMP scores do not necessarily result in higher GPAs. That class was projected to graduate 1,023 students, and Brown's model showed that the ACCOMP as the sole predictor explained only 30.35% of the variance in grade point averages (Figure 4). More importantly, the ACCOMP performed even more poorly as a predictor of low GPAs, correlating only 1.52% of the time (Figure 5).
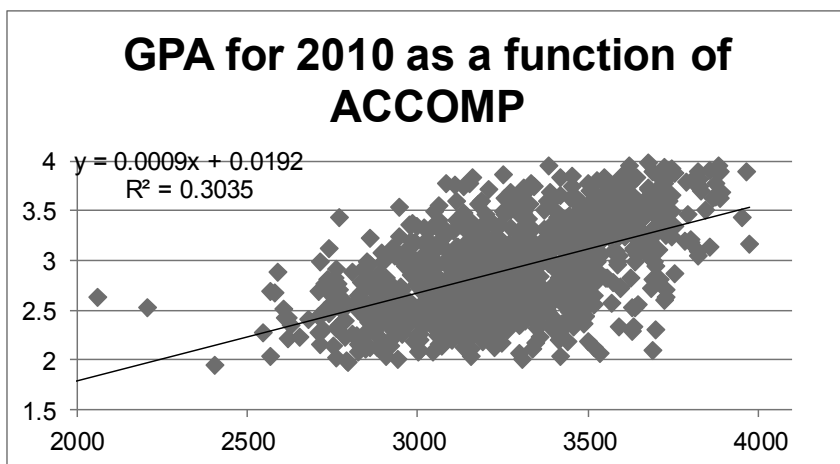
Figure 4
The GPA for Class of 2010 as a Function of the Academic Composite Scores (Brown, 2009)
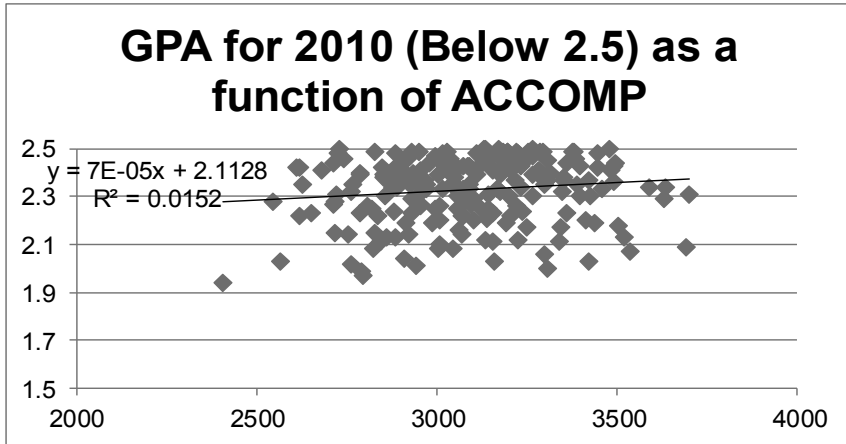
Figure 5
The GPA for Class of 2010 (below 2.5) as a Function of the Academic Composite Scores (Brown, 2009)

Motivation

Several studies have concluded that student motivation is a crucial element in second language acquisition (Ehrman et al., 2003; Gardner, 1985; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Stansfield, 2008). Dornyei and Ushioda (2013) argue that motivation is one of the primary components of successful second language acquisition and additional components of motivation, such as intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and goal setting, should be explored in greater depth.

In this study, the FLMI variable alone was more accurate in predicting second language learning success than did the ACCOMP model or the ACCOMP/MOTIVATION model. In fact, as Figure 6 indicates, the addition of the motivation survey to the academy language placement in 2013 and 2014 resulted in a statistically significant reduction in the number of students with deficient grades (less than a 2.00 GPA) in Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese, and a statistically significant reduction in the percentage of unsuccessful students (less than a 3.00 GPA), with the exception of Russian, in comparison to student averages from 2009-2012.

It is interesting to note that students studying Russian performed considerably worse in 2013-2014 than did their counterparts in 2009-2012. Excluding the Russian results, the overall percentage of students with deficient grades in 2013-2014 was 2.3% lower than that in 2009-2012, and the percentage of students with deficient grades would have dropped to 6.8%, compared to 13.6% in 2009-2012.
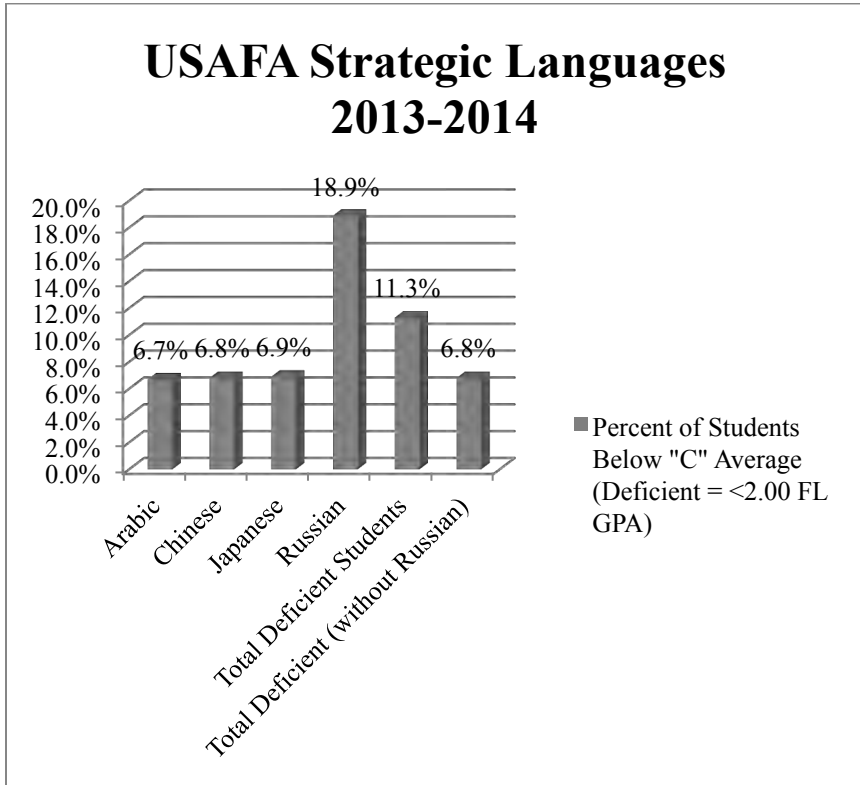
Figure 6
The Academy's Strategic Languages Grade Distribution 2013-2014

Figure 7 shows that the addition of the motivation survey into the placement process also resulted in a statistically significant reduction in the percentage of unsuccessful (less than a 3.00 GPA) students in Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese, with the exception of Russian.
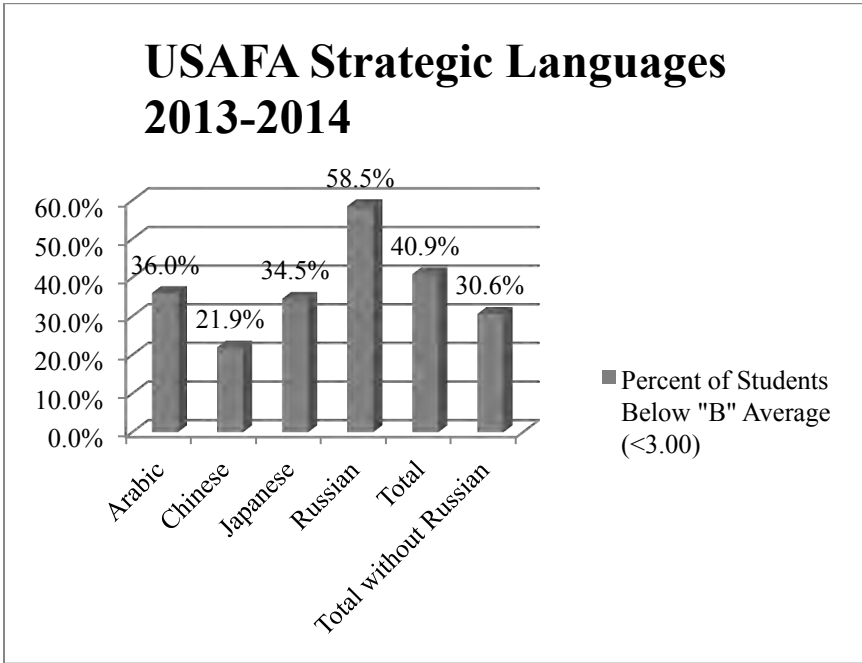
USAFA Strategic Languages 2013-2014

Figure 7
The Academy's Strategic Languages Grade Distribution 2013-2014 (Less than 3.00 (B) average)

The overall percentage of unsuccessful students in 2013-2014 was 3% lower than that in 2009-2012. Excluding the Russian results, the percentage would have been reduced by over 13% to just 30.6%, as compared to 44.4% in 2009-2012. More research is necessary to determine why the Russian results differed so dramatically from the other less commonly taught languages.

CONCLUSION

The motivation survey appears to bolster the argument that if the USAFA intends to provide foundational language training to large numbers of students in order to meet the DoD's foreign language mandates, it cannot continue to ignore motivation, one of the fundamental components of second language acquisition. It is in the USAFA's and the military services' best interests to conduct further research on the motivation aspect of second language acquisition and to employ the FLMI. Based on the study's results, the USAFA should eliminate the ACCOMP variable when considering foreign language placement, and employ only student choice and the results of the FLMI.

Other governmental academic institutions may also want to consider whether the addition of the FLMI may provide value in foreign language

placement policies. Although the educational environment at other institutions, such as the Defense Language Institute and the Foreign Service Institute, is different from the standard academy foreign language programs in terms of weekly contact hours and intensity of training, it may still be appropriate to study whether the FLMI may enhance the overall predictive value of their current practice in foreign language placement. The challenge for the United States foreign language education system is how to identify and address individual learning differences that affect language learning attitudes (Robinson, 2012) and how to effectively motivate students in the second language acquisition process.

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APPENDIX

The USAFA's Foreign Language Motivation Instrument

1. Check the choice that applies to you:
   (Mark A or B on the Scantron answer sheet for this question.)

   A.   I would like to speak a difficult language like Russian, Chinese, Japanese, or Arabic.
   B.   I would be happiest studying one of the following languages: Spanish, German, French, or Portuguese.

For the following questions, please respond in accordance with the following scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral Agree/Disagree; 4= Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

2. I am motivated to learn a foreign language.
3. I enjoy meeting and listening to people who speak other languages.
4. I want to learn a foreign language well enough to use it effectively in my future career.
5. It is important to learn a foreign language in order to understand the culture of its speakers better.
6. I can imagine myself as someone who is able to use a foreign language well.
7. I would like to have friends who speak the foreign language I am studying.
8. I like the challenge that learning a foreign language poses.
9. Learning a foreign language is an important part of the school program.
10. If I planned to stay in another country, I would make a great effort to learn the language even though I could get along in English.
11. I look forward to learning a new foreign language or furthering my language learning from the past.
12. I enjoy practicing a foreign language with those who speak it.
13. I want to become a person who is able to converse in another language.

AUTHOR

Haning Hughes, *Ph.D., Associate Professor of Chinese and Deputy Department Head, Department of Foreign Languages, United States Air Force Academy. Email: Haning.Hughes@usafa.edu.*

REVIEWS

Educating Second Language Teachers: The Same Things Done Differently. By D. Freeman (2016). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 290. ISBN 9780194427562.

Reviewed by BRUNELLA BIGI
Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center

Educating Second Language Teachers: The Same Things Done Differently, by D. Freeman (2016), is a comprehensive and stimulating exposition on the many facets of teaching languages. It is essential for the instructor new to the profession, but it is especially helpful to more seasoned professionals to revisit the historical evolution of the language teaching profession. Freeman's work is full of insights and reflections that address questions or resolve doubts about trajectories taken by the language teaching profession in recent decades.

Freeman's study is a concatenation of frameworks by which we may better understand the course of events and changes that have reshaped roles and practices. The author provides not only an outline of the processes that brought about pedagogical shifts, but also offers an historical perspective of the evolution of various positions on second language acquisition throughout the years. It is a must-read for language program managers and professional teacher trainers interested in expanding their knowledge and understanding of the transformational inner process underscoring the professional life of language instructors.

Freeman groups his studies into four sections. The first section frames the individual language teacher's identity within the context of sociocultural backgrounds and classroom practices. Freeman identifies the main challenges and attempts to situate the language teaching profession with its peculiarities that carries intrinsic traits, unlike the teaching of other subjects. Languages are the lifeblood of social interactions, and the language teacher may be the resource or the content of his own language teaching. The tools used in the classroom can be difficult to untangle from daily social dynamics and interference from the

outside world. What happens in the classroom is defined by Freeman as social acts, and separate from the social dynamic of the outside world. Thus, the first framework of interpretation foresees classroom content, which in our case the language, as a social act with its own role. Although in my view this vision needs further clarification, perhaps supported by more specifically situated examples, it is clear that depending on this framework of interpretation changes have an impact on three axial roles: the teacher, the language, and the learner. The instructional model, be it a traditional transfer of knowledge, a transactional or a transformational model, remains the referential condition where these roles interconnect.

The second part highlights the varied layers of teachers' education or induction into the profession. The most important part of this section is the fact that Freeman recognizes that teachers learn how to teach in three ways: within the disciplinary track of teacher's education; with the *born expertise*, the *made over time;* and the *learning in place* track. These do not occur in the same sequence for everybody. Language teachers often start by learning in place and only later go back and receive a formal language pedagogical education. This seems to be the case at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC); therefore, the third and fourth sections of the book are relevant for the DLIFLC environment. I find it interesting to see how Freeman frames internal professional development as producing *hybrid* language teacher professionals. Specifically, Freeman states that in order to be able to provide professional development it is important to understand how teachers think as they travel the three paths mentioned. I generally agree with Freeman, but find this analysis a bit too positive and pragmatic. I would have appreciated more case studies or examples of how various models tend to impact outcomes and generate challenges when teachers integrate the three paths.

The three phases of thinking, knowing, and reflecting common to the professional growth process are the pivotal focus of the third part of the book. They correspond to the inner and outer work that the teacher must undertake in order to become part of a community of practice, make sense of their profession, and take an active stance. In this section the author underscores how gaining awareness of every aspect of the thinking process helps integrate the instructor. Freeman provides an historical outline of the various generations of thinking orientations, thus allowing the reader to understand how language teaching moved from methods to the post-method era through various generations. The generational approach includes all constituents of the discipline: from psychology and other branches of the social sciences that have influenced the teaching language profession. Another important note regarding this analysis is that it allows teachers to use Freeman's reflective process framework as a lens through which one may observe the discrepancies between thinking and doing or, as Freeman puts it, between what we profess and what we do, or think we are doing.

Finally, the conceptual groundwork of the first three parts evolves into a programmatic vision in the fourth chapter, which outlines second language

teacher professional development programs as well as the designs of such programs. Freeman's models for teacher education seem to reproduce the social context in which they develop. The underpinning of the social framework of references defines their social and political structure. For example, the author cites the differences between English as a Second Language (ESL), Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and English Language Learner (ELL) programs. Social facts and the sense of belonging to a community of practice draw the orientation of programs and training programs for teachers. Freeman describes social facts as "shared repertoire to define what is and can be talked about" (p.239). In other words, the author believes that the nature of professional teacher training programs mirrors the internal self-referential demand of teachers. I agree with these premises but expected a more substantial criticism of the fact that it takes for granted that language instructor are consistently monitoring and self-regulating professional capacities. This warrants rethinking. In my view there exist dangerous limitations to the self-referential nature of what we do in the classroom and on the content we teach. One example is the language instructor's tendency to stress the uniqueness of one's own language when compared to others. The reflective process should include direct confrontation with a multitude of realities that are becoming part of our changing profession. The weakness of the mapping of land changing realities due to massive migrations and globalization, and the lack of professional debate related to the ensuing linguistics challenges, in my opinion, weakens Freeman's overly inclusive and wide-ranging study. That is to say, it does not critically assess the consequences of an ultra-flexible professional stance overwhelmingly dictated by contingencies. The risk, I contend, is a drifting discipline of learning in future training programs doomed to walk a very narrow path of reified realities.

Freeman's study concludes with highlights of a new set of references that seem to characterize the shifts occurred in the transformative period. Here, Freeman makes an important distinction between tools and social acts. In the new frame of references, contents morphed into social acts that are orchestrated within the situated classroom. Residues of teaching methodologies may still be found in the instructor's eclectic toolbox. Tools symbolically define the profession. And, depending on how they are used, tools will produce a variety of outcomes. Freeman points out that transformative learning occurs at many levels. From a historical standpoint there have been pedagogical shifts: the language teaching profession has transitioned from a series of prescriptive methods transmitted as skills in which instructors are to be trained, to a descriptive identity seeking process that aims to draw a path toward philosophies of teaching much more dependent on environmental conditions. In the past, teaching skills were applied in the classroom on the basis of individual abilities and institutional demands. Teaching and training, in this respect, were still nothing more than transmission of contents effected by a series of more or less effective techniques. When does one become a teacher? Does it happen when one has learned enough about the subject or when one has acquired the

techniques to convey it to another? The same question can work for other similar roles, such as the education of future trainers. When does the learning occur? When does the shift happen in the experiential and classroom environment? To use Freeman's words "the nominal triangle of teacher-student-content can be misleading in offering an illusion of stability, suggesting that what is taught is what is (or ought to be) learned" (p. 14). The shift in awareness occurs when the triangle becomes a pronominal relationship among the parts.

Foreign language teachers may find Freedman's book a compelling meta-analysis of the numerous learning loops through which we must leap throughout our careers. Yet, it also provides many opportunities for pause and reflection. Freeman's work is relevant to institutions like the DLIFLC, where the training and a great portion of the professional development of instructors are conducted in-house. In conclusion, I found this book very strong in the meta-analysis of the phases that characterize the making of a professional language instructor despite some hesitations in addressing and expanding the controversial issues to which I alluded earlier.

Developing Interactional Competence in a Japanese Study Abroad Context. By N. Taguchi. (2015). Bristol/New York, NY: Multilingual Matters. Pp. 184. ISBN 9781783093717.

Reviewed by XIAOFEI TANG
Carnegie Mellon University

     Developing Interactional Competence in a Japanese Study Abroad Context, by Naoko Taguchi, reports on a longitudinal study of second language (L2) learners' development of interactional competence in a Japanese study abroad context. Adapting the theoretical framework of interactional competence, Taguchi documents eighteen L2 learners' use of linguistic and interactional resources in informal conversations during one semester. Specifically, it traces learners' changes in using speech styles and incomplete sentences. The study also examines the relationships among contexts, learners' individual differences and linguistic gains, providing in-depth analysis of L2 learners' developmental trajectories in the study-abroad context.

     The book has nine chapters. Chapter 1 overviews the framework of interactional competence. Chapter 2 introduces two primary interactional resources available in spoken Japanese: speech styles and incomplete sentence endings. Chapter 3 reviews previous literature that examined study-abroad as the context for language learning. From Chapters 4 through 8, the author describes the research methods and data analysis and discusses learners' interactional development. Chapter 9 concludes with implications for the construct of interactional competence and L2 development.

     As introduced in Chapter 1, this study bases its theoretical framework on the model of interactional competence (Hall, Hellermann, & Doehler, 2011; Young 2007, 2011). Such competence views language ability as a dynamic construct that is locally situated and jointly constructed by all participants in context. Thus, language ability is neither fixed nor stable; rather, it is dependent on specific social contexts and behaviors of other interlocutors. Young (2011) ideates three resources that interlocutors employ in real-time interaction: identity (i.e., participation framework); linguistic resources (i.e., register, modes of meaning); and interactional resources (i.e., speech acts, turn-taking, repair, and boundaries). These resources guide Taguchi's data analysis.

     In Chapter 2, Taguchi describes two primary interactional resources in Japanese—speech styles and incomplete sentences. In Japanese, the polite form and the plain form appear at the end of utterances to signal a range of social meanings, among which are politeness, formality, and affection. Expert speakers employ not only appropriate speech styles in different contexts, but also shifts

between the two forms during real-time conversation that index various social meanings. In addition, native Japanese speakers frequently use incomplete sentences to demonstrate common understanding. However, acquiring speech styles and incomplete sentences are challenges for L2 learners.

In Chapter 3, Taguchi reviews relevant literature that examines study abroad as a context for language learning. Previous research indicates that study-abroad provides learners with opportunities to engage in various linguistic and cultural practices, but learners' individual differences heavily impact the learning outcomes in the target language community. Taguchi's study, based on previous studies, attempts to examine the relationships among contexts, learners' linguistic gains, and individual differences.

The study's participants, introduced in Chapter 4, were 18 intermediate-level Japanese learners enrolled in an intensive Japanese language program at a private university in Tokyo. At the beginning and the end of the semester, all participants completed motivation and Japanese contact surveys and engaged in pair conversations about everyday topics (e.g., hobbies, weekend activities) for 20 minutes. Taguchi occasionally joined the conversation (about 40% of the time) in order to see if learners switched speech styles according to varying participant structures (i.e., peer-to-peer vs. between learners and researcher). The motivation survey assessed motivation and interest in the host culture. The Japanese contact survey documented the amount of out-of-class contact with Japanese (modified from the Language Contact Profile by Freed, Dewey, & Segalowitz, 2004). Eight of the participants also participated in three rounds of interviews throughout the semester. These participants were selected based on enthusiasm, national diversity, gender, length of study, living arrangements, and reasons for studying abroad. The interview questions involved three major themes: 1) Japanese study; 2) experience in studying abroad; and 3) cultural contact and communication.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe changes in participants' speech styles and style-shifting, which indicated their interactional development. Chapter 5 shows that participants increased the use of plain forms (47% to 79%) and decreased the use of polite forms (48% to 15%) in informal conversations from the beginning to the end of the semester. In particular, learners developed the ability to use plain forms for joint meaning-making and a wider range of speech acts. Moreover, learners made marked increase in the use of incomplete sentences (5.7% to 16.7%). Chapter 6 analyzes learners' style shifting in two types of participant structures: two-way (peer to peer) and three-way (learners and researcher) conversation. At the group level, learners did not change the proportion of the plain and polite forms used throughout the semester. On an individual level, however, several participants differentiated speech styles between the two participant structures.

Chapter 7 documents notable changes in learners' increased use of incomplete sentences, another indicator of interactional development. The learners adopted more naturalistic speech by increasing the use of incomplete sentences throughout the semester (from 5.7% to 16.7%). Through conversation

analysis, the author demonstrated learners' measurable improvement in using incomplete sentences to establish mutual understanding and to co-construct sequential turns in moment-to-moment conversation.

In Chapter 8, Taguchi provides case histories of four learners' social networks and their L2 developmental trajectories. These were selected based on the diversity of the participants' backgrounds. Three of the participants were actively involved in the target language community and developed interactional competence in dynamic contexts. One participant did not establish stable social networks during the semester. Interview data showed that his meticulous personality (e.g., low tolerance of ambiguity) might have hindered his cultivating strong relationships in local communities. However, this participant also showed improvements in speech styles and the use of incomplete sentences in conversations.

In the era of globalization, second language learners not only need to learn vocabulary and grammar, but also need to be able to communicative effectively in the target language community. Adapting the framework of interactional competence, this book successfully identifies two kinds of interactional resources in Japanese (i.e., speech styles, incomplete sentences) and illustrates learners' changes in employing these resources in informal conversations. The author encourages future studies to continue examining L2 interactional development through the analysis of various linguistic and interactional resources not only in Japanese but also in other languages.

This book points to new venues for further research about the relationship between contextual and individual factors and L2 development. At variance with many study-abroad studies that either assessed learners' L2 learning outcomes or documented learners' social participation in the target community, Taguchi's innovative study combined the analyses of L2 development with individual learners' social-cultural experiences. On the one hand, the author compares learners' changes in employing interactional resources in informal conversations (Chapters 5 through 7). On the other, interview data from four learners were cross-examined with the conversation data to demonstrate the relationship between L2 development and individual learners' social engagement (Chapter 8). The relationship addressed in Chapter 8, however, needs further investigation because the four learners—three actively engaged in the target community and one did not—showed marked interactional development. This indicated the complex, nonlinear relationship between L2 development and learners' social experience, which needs to be explored further. A weakness of the study is its reliance on self-reported interview data on learners' social contact and participation. Future studies may add other data-collection approaches, such as observation and field notes, to provide a better picture of participants' social engagement. In summary, this book is a valuable resource for students, teachers, and researchers of second language acquisition and interactional competence.

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UPCOMING EVENTS 2018

JANUARY

January 4-7   *Modern Language Association (MLA)* Convention, New
York City, NY
Information: www.mla.org/convention

January 4-7   *Linguistic Society of American (LSA)* Annual Meeting,
Salt Lake City, UT
Information: www.linguisticsociety.org

FEBRUARY

February 1-4   *American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East
European Languages (AATSEEL)*, Washington, DC
Information: www.aatseel.org

MARCH

March 8-11   *California Language Teachers' Association (CLTA)* annual
conference, Ontario, CA
Information: cita.net

March 15-17   *Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT)*
Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA
Information: www.scolt.org

March 24-27   *American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL)*,
Chicago, IL
Information: www.aaal.org

March 27-30   *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)*
International Convention, Chicago, IL
Information: www.tesol.org

APRIL

April 6-8   *Chinese Language Teachers Association (CLTA)* Annual
Conference, Herndon, VA
Information: clta-us.org

MAY

May 27-June 1   *NAFSA: Association of International Educators* Annual
Conference and Expo, Philadelphia, PA
Information: www.nafsa.org

May 29- June 2   *Computer-Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO)* Annual Conference. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, IL
Information: calico.org

JUNE

June 24-27   *International Society for Language Studies (ISLS)*
London, UK
Information: www.isls.co/index.html
June 25-28   *American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP)* Annual Conference, Salamanca, Spain
Information: http://www.aatsp.org

NOVEMBER

November 15-18 *Middle East Studies Association (MESA)* Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX
Information: mesana.org/annual-meeting/ upcoming.html
November 16-18 *American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Annual Convention (ACTFL)*, New Orleans, LA
Information: www.actfl.org
November 16-18 *American Association of Teachers of German (AATG)* Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA
Information: www.aatg.org.
November 16-18 *American Association of Teachers of Japanese (AATJ)* Fall Conference, New Orleans, LA
Information: www.aatj.org

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Submission Information for Authors

AIMS AND SCOPE

Applied Language Learning (ALL) is to promote professional communication within the Defense Language Program and academic communities on adult language learning for functional purposes.

The Editor encourages the submission of research and review manuscripts from such disciplines as: (1) instructional methods and techniques; (2) curriculum and materials development; (3) testing and evaluation; (4) implications and applications of research from related fields in linguistics, education, communication, psychology, and social sciences; and (5) assessment of needs within the profession.

SPECIFICATIONS FOR MANUSCRIPTS

Prepare the manuscripts in accordance with the following requirements:

- Follow the American Psychological Association (APA) style (the 6th Edition)
- Not exceeding 6,000 words (not including reference, appendix, etc.)
- Use double spacing, with margins of one inch on all four sides
- Use Times New Roman font size 12
- Number all pages consecutively
- In black and white only, including graphics and tables
- Create graphics and tables in a Microsoft Office application (such as Word, PowerPoint, Excel)
- Graphics and tables should not exceed 4.5" in width
- Do not use the footnotes and endnotes function in MS Word. Insert a number formatted in superscript following a punctuation mark. Type notes on a separate page
- Keep the layout of the text as simple as possible

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENT

Applied Language Learning publishes only original works that have not been previously published elsewhere and that are not under consideration by other publications.

Each submission must contain (1) a title page, including author information; (2) abstract of the article; (3) five keywords; and (4) manuscript, including references.

Send all submissions electronically to the Editor: jiaying.howard@dliflc.edu.

REVIEW PROCESS

Manuscripts will be acknowledged by the editor upon receipt and subsequently sent out for peer review. Authors will be informed about the status of the article once the peer reviews have been received and processed. Reviewer comments will be shared with the authors. Once an article has been accepted for publication, the author will receive further instructions regarding the submission of the final copy.

CORRESPONDENCE

Send all inquiries and editorial correspondence by email to the Editor:

jiaying.howard@dliflc.edu.

Guidelines for Manuscript Preparation

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Divide your manuscript into the following sections, in the order listed below:
1. Title and Author Information
2. Abstract
3. Keywords
4. Text body, including:
   - Acknowledgements (optional)
   - Notes (optional)
   - References
   - Tables and figures (optional)
   - Appendixes (optional)

REVIEW ARTICLE

It should describe, discuss, and evaluate publications that fall into a topical category in foreign language education. The relative significance of the publications in the context of teaching realms should be pointed out. A review article should be 15 to 20 double-spaced pages.

REVIEW

Submit reviews of textbooks, scholarly works on foreign language education, dictionaries, tests, computer software, audio-video materials, computer and mobile applications, and other non-print materials. Point out both positive and negative aspects of the work(s) being considered. In the three to five double-spaced pages of the manuscript, give a clear but brief statement of the work's content and a critical assessment of its contribution to the profession. Keep quotations short. Do not send reviews that are merely descriptive.

COMMENTARY

ALL invites essays that exchange ideas and views on innovative foreign language education, and comments on matters of general academic or critical interest or on articles in previous issues. Essays should not exceed 2,000 words.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Applied Language Learning, a refereed journal published semiannually by the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center and Presidio of Monterey, is soliciting articles for publication.

The Journal *(US* ISSN 1041-679X and ISSN 2164-0912 for the online version) is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on instructional methods and techniques, curriculum and materials development, assessment of needs within the profession, testing and evaluation, and implications and applications of research from related fields such as linguistics, education, communications, psychology, and the social sciences. The journal seeks to serve the professional interest of language teachers, administrators, and researchers concerned with the teaching of foreign languages to adult learners. We welcome articles that describe innovative and successful practice and methods and/or report educational research or experimentation.

Deadline: Submissions are welcome at any point. Manuscripts received by *31 March* will be considered for the spring issue and by *30 September* for the fall issue of the journal.

Send your manuscript electronically to the Editor:

jiaying.howard@dliflc.edu

Read the recent and past issues of *Applied Language Learning* at:

http://www.dliflc.edu/resources/publications/applied-language-learning/