Instructor Target Language Use in Today’s World Language Classrooms

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Abstract

Current best practice recommendations for world language teaching and research in second language acquisition point to the importance of consistent teacher target language use in order to aid students in the acquisition process. In light of research and recommendations, this study sought to investigate K-16 current practices with regard to target language use. A survey of instructors’ goals of target language use revealed that instructors tend to value the importance of using the target language with their students. However, based on self-reported actual target language use, it was found that many instructors do not reach their goals. Qualitative data reveal the reported obstacles and classroom realities of 237 language educators impacting target language utilization. In order for instructors to reach their goals effectively, this article identifies and describes specific recommendations for classroom target language use to enhance student acquisition.

Background

Few researchers and theorists today would disagree with the essential role of target language input in the language acquisition process. Target language input has been identified as the overarching concept that permeates all second language acquisition theory (ACTFL, 2010; Burke, 2010; Chavez, 2006; Gass, 1997; Lightbown, 2000; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Wilbur, 2007). A reoccurring topic in publications, target language input is fundamental to overall language development. Exposing students to significant amounts of comprehensible input has proven to be crucial to the development of student proficiency and essential for the establishment of mental linguistic representations of the language. Chambers, 1991; Chaudron, 1988; Ellis, 2005; Ellis, Tanaka &
Researchers have urged world language instructors to maximize their use of
the target language during instruction (Ellis, 2005), to create a target language
atmosphere in their classrooms and a context for real communication in order to
set an example for and promote student production (Hall, 2001; Halliwell & Jones,
1991; Macaro, 2000; Macdonald, 1993), especially given the fact that there may
be few opportunities for students to encounter input outside of the class setting.
Many students themselves would claim that, beyond course or credit requirements,
a logical rationale for studying a language is to develop the ability to communicate.

Official statements and policy as to the amount of instruction that should take
place in the target language has been established by the American Council on the
Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2010), ACTFL and the National Council
for Accreditation of Teacher Education (ACTFL/NCATE, 2002) and the National
Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Language Programs (NADSFL,
1999). ACTFL’s 2010 Position Statement on target language use emphasizes the
importance of ‘meaningful communication’ and ‘interactive feedback’ that leads
to communicative and cultural competence. In addition, the statement cites
the emphasis on target language interaction in the K-16 Standards for Foreign
Language Learning in the 21st Century. Finally, the statement “recommends that
language educators and their students use the target language as exclusively as
possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction during instructional time and, when
feasible, beyond the classroom” (ACTFL, 2010). Teacher training publications
advocate target language use for overall classroom interactions, including
instructions for activities and tasks as well as behavior management (Curtain &
Dahlberg, 2010; Hall, 2001; Lee & VanPatten, 2003; Lipton, 1994; Omaggio Hadley,
2001; Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

Theory, research and practice do not always go hand in hand. In the case of
target language use in the world language classroom, in fact, there is a tension
between policy, research and practice. Thus, while research and policy have made
statements regarding the importance of target language input in the acquisition
process, studies dating back to the 1990s document the wide range of the
percentage of class time that instructors dedicate to speaking the target language
to their students (Duff & Polio, 1990, Macaro, 2001; Turnbull, 1999; Wilkerson,
1994, 2008). Further data from the fall 2008 ACTFL survey of 2,208 teachers,
cited that 25.4% of the educators reported using the target language 100% during
instructional time (ACTFL, 2009). In that survey, it was commonly reported that
50% of instruction was done in the target language in lower-level classes and 75%
in upper-level courses. During the 2007-2008 academic year, 5000 elementary
and secondary schools revealed in a survey conducted by the Center for Applied
Linguistics (CAL) that roughly one third of their teachers used the target language
75%-100% of instructional time (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2008). Burke (2010) reports
from her observations of U.S. elementary and secondary language classes, that
“...English is still dominant, whether in a Beginning or Advanced class” (p. 50). The claim made by Grove (2003) regarding the “enormous disconnect between theoretically informed research and generalized classroom practice” suggests that further work is needed (p. 310). The purpose of the current study is to investigate and report the contemporary realities of classroom practices across levels (K-16) and languages. The overarching research questions are: (1) What differences exist, if any, between instructors’ goals for target language use per class session versus self-reported actual usage? (2) What obstacles do instructors report as the root cause of not speaking more often to their students in the target language?

Methodology

Questionnaire

Administration of anonymous questionnaires took place at regional world language educator conferences and workshops in Western Pennsylvania and Southwestern and Central Ohio. A short questionnaire (See Appendix A) was administered in paper format to gather both qualitative and quantitative data on teacher target language use. Instructors chose a percentage range that matched their goals for target language use. Additionally, respondents estimated their actual target language use during a typical class session by choosing from the same percentage range categories. The questionnaire included open-ended reflective questions in which respondents listed the obstacles that prevent them from using more target language with their students. The qualitative data were organized and tabulated under twenty-four categories, based on type of responses. These twenty-four categories were further organized into three overarching thematic groupings. Instructor responses were tabulated and frequency of response in each category and thematic grouping was recorded.

Participants

Surveyed instructors came from three states: Kentucky, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Size and type of institution as well as languages taught were not restricted. Sampling was not random in that instructors were attending conferences and workshops on professional development. Of the 237 instructors who completed the questionnaire, 11.8% were university instructors, 74.3% taught in a high school setting, 19.4% in a middle school and 9.7% at the elementary school level. Some instructors reported teaching at multiple levels. Seven languages were represented by the respondents: 0.4% teaching Arabic, 1.7% Chinese, 24.5% French, 7.6% German, 1.3% Italian, 1.3% Japanese, and 71.7% Spanish. Some instructors reported teaching more than one language.

Results

Goal versus Self-reported Actual Usage

Many respondents reported goals of target language use aligning with the ACTFL 2010 position statement: 40.9% of the instructors indicated that their goal was to use the target language during 90-100% of any given class session. 23.2%
reported a goal of 80-90%, 18.6% reported a goal of 70-80% and 10.5% indicated a goal of 60-70%. Only 6.8% of respondents had goals of target language use below 60% (See Figure 1). Clearly, instructors tend to value the importance of providing input to their students in the target language during every class session, with more than 80% of the respondents indicating a desired usage rate of 70% or greater.

Figure 1. Target Language Use

The self reports of the 237 respondents reveal a wider, more even distribution of actual target language use, differing considerably from the reported goals. The most marked difference occurred at the highest level of usage with only 10.5% of the instructors reporting actual utilization of the target language 90-100% of the time compared to 40.9% stating this rate as their goal. Similar numbers of respondents reported actual target language use for nearly all rate ranges. Figure 1 shows a comparison of instructor goals and self-reported actual use of the target language. Note that, in general, these results suggest that teachers tend to fall short of their goals for use of the target language during instruction. There was a significant positive correlation between level of teaching and the reported goal of target language use (p-value < 0.03). The reported use of target language also trended higher with teaching level, however it was not statistically significant.

Reported Obstacles

The qualitative responses were organized into three overarching thematic groupings: obstacles beyond the instructor’s control, student factors, and teacher training issues. Respondents were free to indicate more than one obstacle. Among the reported obstacles, 11.3% of all responses pertain to factors beyond the teacher’s control, 31.4% refer to student factors and 57.3% of the responses
relate to teacher training issues. Instructors reported the following obstacles as factors beyond the teacher’s control: large class sizes; lack of parent, community, administrative and/or technology support; scheduling interruptions; and the need to maintain program for job security. See Table 1 for a breakdown of the percentage of respondents who indicated each of these obstacles.

**Table 1. Obstacles Beyond Teacher Control**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>% Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large class size</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain program/job security</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of administrative support</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of technology</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule interruptions</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental support/community involvement</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of class sessions/scheduling</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative data results show that 31.4% of respondents cited student factors to explain their lack of target language use. Listed in Table 2 are more specific obstacles belonging to this thematic grouping, along with the percentage of respondents who cited these obstacles in the study questionnaire. One instructor stated, “The biggest obstacle is initial student resistance.” Another instructor describes students who literally ‘shut down’ or ‘tune out’ any target language provided by the teacher. Teachers feel forced to speak in English, since their students refuse to even try to understand cognates. Perceived lack of comprehension and frustration among students as well as instructor lack of confidence in students’ ability to actually comprehend input solely in the target language convinces some teachers that they must provide English clarifications. One instructor reported “feeling like they must understand everything,” while another stated, “I assume that students will not understand or rebel.” Key words that teachers often included to describe student reactions to teacher target language use include resistance, frustration, refusal, unwillingness, ignorance, panic and fear. Thus, instructors reported feeling forced to resort to English, but also described a feeling of guilt when they did so. According to one instructor, “The students’ frustration leads me to speak English. I feel that every time I speak English, I am failing my students.”

**Table 2. Obstacles Involving Student Factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>% Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative attitude</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High anxiety</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low attention span</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third overarching obstacle contributing to the difficulty of teacher target language use involves teacher preparation and training. Instructors noted lack of linguistic abilities to speak the target language, as well as a need for teaching techniques to deal with the following: students’ varying abilities and previous preparation, classroom management, establishing rapport with students, inadequate time allotted to achieve program goals, grammar and cultural instruction. Many teachers wrote comments in which they sought advice, training, suggestions, and new techniques for using the target language successfully with their students. Table 3 presents obstacles belonging to this thematic category and the corresponding percentage of respondents who mentioned them. Representative instructor responses for all obstacle categories are available in Appendix B.

Table 3. Obstacles Involving Teaching Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>% Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time allotted to complete curriculum</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher language proficiency</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management issues</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with a range of student ability</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering grammar explanations</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of student previous preparation</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teaching methodology training in general</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing rapport with students</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering cultural lessons</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical issues/fatigue</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to give instructions in English</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive concern with student comprehension</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion and Recommendations

Reported goals versus estimates of actual target language use reveal that instructors often fall short of their proclaimed goals. Furthermore, two previous studies utilizing self-reporting found that the respondents underestimated their use of English during class sessions, due to instances of code switching, comprehension checks involving translation, and other types of intervention in the native language (Wing, 1980; Wilkerson, 1994 in Wilkerson, 2008). In a study on target language use by Polio and Duff (1994), there came to light an actual “…lack of awareness on the part of the teachers as to how, when, and the extent to which they actually use English in the classroom” (p. 320). Furthermore, as one instructor from the current study stated, “I’ve been conscious of using too much English in class, and start out speaking Japanese, then later find myself speaking English again.” Therefore, since instructors may be unaware of the extent to which they are utilizing English during class sessions, their projections may be overly high estimates. In other words, the discrepancy that exists between goals and estimated use may be larger than demonstrated through self-reports.
Various studies conducted abroad in secondary, foreign language settings report the use of English for discipline, grammar and culture explanations, instructions for setting up activities and homework, lexical translation and comprehension checks, building relationships with learners, testing, listing lesson objectives, and to account for the mixed abilities of learners (Dickson, 1992; Franklin, 1990; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Prahbu, 1987; Macaro, 1995; 1997; 2000; Meiring & Norman, 2002; Mitchell, 1988). In the United States, research has revealed that instructors utilize English for discipline and classroom management, grammar explanations, clarification, saving time and avoiding ambiguity (Duff & Polio, 1990; Kraemer, 2006; Wing, 1980).

Reported goals for target language use demonstrate that many instructors view its use in the classroom as important. However, this acknowledgement of the language acquisition process does not automatically translate into the ability to apply the appropriate techniques to make the target language used in the classroom comprehensible. According to the qualitative data from this study, the overriding factor hindering instructor decisions to provide target language input for their students involve areas that show lack of teacher preparation and training. Based on the obstacles reported, the following recommendations support instructors as they increase the amount of target language provided to students in each class session.

**Instructor Strategies**

There are numerous strategies that instructors can employ to assist learners in comprehending the spoken language without providing translations or class sessions in English. If applied as a total package, instructors can consistently surround students with the target language, while providing learners with the level of support necessary for them to participate actively in real language tasks.

1. Instructors can make extensive use of Total Physical Response techniques, concrete objects, visuals, gestures, facial expressions and body movements in order that the target language is meaningful and comprehensible to students.
2. The use of modeling or acting to convey meaning is an essential technique to assist student comprehension. Instructors can pair the modeling with spoken language while using exaggerated gestures and props to model or act out every step of a process or direction lines. This can provide a positive challenge for the students as they consider all of the contextualized clues, take risks and guess the meaning of the target language.
3. Instructors can utilize graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams, concept maps, T charts, tables, and bar graphs to assist learners with target language comprehension and to train them in the application of higher order thinking skills.
4. For applicable languages, instructors can take advantage of cognates. By extensively utilizing cognates, instructors can deliberately assist learners in their comprehension of the spoken target language.
5. The instructor can fill silent moments with talk in a target language environment. For instance, as the instructor faces a technology issue or searches for materials,
verbalizing these activities aloud to students during the lesson will ultimately assist students in comprehending more target language. These actions are associated with the target language and occur in natural and real world situations.

6. Instructors can teach guided note taking as a technique to assist students in comprehending explanations offered in the target language. A sample of the notes with blank spaces, much like a cloze activity, keeps learners engaged and assists them in organizing new information.

7. Instructors can check for comprehension without translating to English. Students can utilize specific gestures to demonstrate comprehension. They can act out actions the instructor describes, draw what they hear, or signal comprehension with hand raising, pointing, standing or showing a number or card.

8. Instructors can teach grammar in the target language. By acting out the meaning of a situation which contains specific structures, the instructor can assist students in making form-meaning connections. Use of presentational software, animation, props and visuals as well as a real world context provide a need for the targeted structures for communication purposes.

9. Sustaining culture as an integral part of each lesson is a key to maintaining instruction in the target language. Instructors can enhance class sessions through target culture visuals and concrete, authentic materials that enrich the context. Utilizing graphic organizers can aid students in the application of higher order thinking skills as they examine products and practices and identify the perspectives of the target cultures.

10. Instructors can give deliberate thought to lesson planning to consider the instructions, transitions, and possible student responses and questions in order to predict and plan for use of effective and comprehensible target language.

**Learner Strategies**

Students can benefit from learning specific strategies for making sense of the target language they are hearing during class sessions. Students who tend to panic when confronted with a new language will appreciate the support of strategies that they can apply from the very first day of class. They may also find these strategies applicable to their studies in other academic areas.

1. Instructors should teach students metacognitive and cognitive strategies that will greatly enhance their ability to function in a target language classroom environment. These include effective practice strategies, learning style preferences, organizing and self-monitoring progress, and guessing meanings of new material through inference. How do students cope with hearing lots of target language? Support learners by informing them that they do not need to understand every word the instructor says, nor is word for word translation a useful strategy.

2. By teaching specific coping strategies for dealing with frustration, anxiety and
panic, instructors will eventually face less resistance if they persevere and believe that their students can comprehend and develop proficiency. Instructors can suggest that students listen for key words. Also, instructors can calm students’ fears by sharing stories of past successes and informing students that they are not the only learner feeling anxious. Offering suggestions for reducing anxiety can eliminate the anxiety that can cause total lack of comprehension. Instructors may find training materials for teaching strategies in various print and online materials (Brown, 2002; Cohen, 2003; Oxford, 1990; Rubin & Thompson, 1994).

3. Students also need to know that language learning is a process of practice as well as trial and error. Risk taking and making educated guesses are vital to the acquisition process in which everyone learns at a different pace. Ambiguity is part of the comprehension process.

4. Instructors can teach students how to utilize to their advantage the techniques that the instructor deliberately employs to assist them in comprehending the target language. Through the use of examples, students can practice how to utilize cognates. Instructors should explain the advantage of props, gestures, visuals, and modeling in order that learners notice and focus on these techniques.

5. Students can become aware of the basic listening strategy that they already utilize in their first language: They do not listen nor do they hear every word that speakers utter to them. Instead, students listen for key words and form a guess as to the overall meaning. If students realize that their guess is incorrect, they can ask follow-up questions for clarification or watch and listen for further gestures and explanation.

6. Students should be taught simple language phrases, questions or other language ‘chunks’ to assist them in keeping interactions in the target language during class sessions. Instructors can provide these on note cards, posters or colored card stock for easy reference to apply during pair work, group work or full class interaction.

Classroom Management Strategies

Instructors should not feel that they will lose control of their class if they speak the target language consistently during class sessions. Simple measures to address management issues are applicable regardless of the language spoken in the classroom. As instructors teach students the appropriate and expected classroom norms of behavior, learners gain further meaningful experiences in the target language.

1. Instructors can privately address the ‘resident interpreter’ in each class, applauding the student’s abilities to comprehend and interpret, but also explaining how important it is to allow all students to reach that level of comprehension.

2. Instructors can establish clear classroom rules and consequences. Once established, the instructor should model and practice these classroom norms in the target language through signaling and Total Physical Response. Safely
admonishing students in the target language is possible. Although they may not understand all of the words, instructors can make the meaning clear by utilizing the context, gestures and cognates.

3. Establishing specific classroom routines and predictable tasks assist with classroom management while at the same time reducing anxiety and providing students with a feeling of comfort and confidence.

4. Creating a target language environment sends students the message that the target language is a means of real communication. As the teacher models effective use of the target language in authentic situations, this can motivate the learners to do likewise. Using authentic target language resources and insisting on only target language interactions maintains high standards for communication. Establishing this environment is important from the very first day of instruction.

5. Instructors can create a community of learners and a cooperative and interactive atmosphere by treating all information that is communicated by class members as important. Teacher responses show interest in the content of student responses, not simply the grammatical correctness of the utterance (Condron Flores, 1998; Hall, 2001).

**Professional/Linguistic Development**

Special considerations can provide instructors with the professional development opportunities that they seek. Delivering assistance, support and feedback in a non-threatening environment can go a long way toward allowing instructors to try out new techniques and strategies for keeping the instruction in the target language. Offering opportunities for non-native teachers to build on their own proficiency can increase their confidence with the language that they teach. It can also spark a renewed enthusiasm for the cultures that speak the target language.

1. Instructors can develop more self-awareness of the language that they employ through the use of recording devices to view and analyze class sessions. Professional reflection and self-evaluation are means of identifying the difference between goals and the perceived classroom reality. Working with a trusted peer, teachers can collaborate to first identify instances of code-switching and then suggest alternative strategies in order that instruction remains in the target language. One-on-one coaching and consultation with veteran teachers or teacher educators can produce similar results if the environment is non-threatening. Providing teacher study groups during which instructors analyze videotaped lessons can assist in raising awareness of the importance of self-monitoring teacher talk (Pessoa et al., 2007).

2. Instructors need to be confident in their students' and their own abilities. It is important to realize that students can function with some ambiguity and that word for word translation is not necessary. Excessive concern for student comprehension can actually hinder the development of proficiency, as this concern can lead teachers to conduct comprehension checks in English or to speak in the target language and then translate into English.
as ways to ensure student understanding. Both of these practices defeat the purpose of teaching for proficiency and providing a richly contextualized target language environment.

3. Teacher-identified obstacles involving how to handle students’ varying abilities and previous student preparation point to the need for additional training and coaching in these areas. Instructors can find practical information to address these obstacles in publications on differentiated instruction (Blaz, 2006; Thomlinson & Imbeau, 2010; Theisen, 2002).

4. As some teachers in this investigation point out, a lack of linguistic ability is the root cause of their lack of TL use with students. A recent study by Fraga-Cañadas (2010) found the need for more professional development opportunities for non-native high school teachers of Spanish in order to maintain and improve the oral proficiency of current teachers in the field. Beyond local linguistic professional development, teachers can explore various funding possibilities, such as state, regional and national language organizations’ study abroad scholarships, to enhance their linguistic and cultural knowledge. A consistent connection with native speakers and the target culture can improve teachers’ linguistic abilities and confidence using the target language in the classroom. Further suggestions for teacher target language maintenance involve language conversation partners, reading for pleasure, book discussion groups and university courses focusing on target language production.

5. Comments from instructors in this study suggest that teachers at times revert to English due to time factors. The pressure to complete a specific grammatical syllabus and the underlying push to cover a specific number of chapters and grammatical presentations in a given period of time may in fact hinder instructors from providing more target language input. Examination of curricular goals and teacher, school and district articulation sessions may lead programs to adopt more appropriate objectives of oral proficiency, thus alleviating this obstacle for instructors.

Advocacy

Promoting language studies is a constant and necessary challenge for world language educators. Parents, administrators and colleagues need to understand current best practices and how they differ from language learning experiences of the past. Instructors should seek opportunities to share their students’ learning experiences with the community as often as possible.

1. Instructors can educate their administrators and community members regarding the goals of language learning and the ways in which world language studies enhance the students’ overall academic preparation. Through information sessions, newsletters and meetings, teachers can inform constituents of the effective techniques they utilize to promote communication in the target language.

2. As instructors incorporate communication and cultural tasks, community-based projects, technology and 21st Century Skills, they can plan
opportunities for students to share their communication efforts in authentic ways with the school community and beyond. This publicity is an important means by which world language instructors gain positive exposure for their programs and for their efforts to teach others to effectively communicate in another language.

3. Create out-of-class, interactive assignments periodically throughout the academic year. Students must interact and teach a staff or faculty member a specified communication task. The adult or faculty member utilizes a form to rate and report on the ability of the student to communicate and to teach the task in the target language. Students practice communication functions as they teach, while they simultaneously advocate for the world languages program.

Limitations of Current Study

One limitation of the current study is that no distinction between native versus non-native speaking instructors was made. The impact of this variable on the amount of target language input provided to learners is not completely clear. Given the fact, however, that several of instructors in this study blamed a lack of linguistic ability for failure to provide target language input, a comparison of the two groups could prove relevant. In addition, respondents in this study did not report years of teaching experience and pedagogical background. An exploration of this area may prove useful in future studies, in order to gain its potential impact on the amount of target language input provided by instructors.

The questionnaire utilized for this study did not allow teachers to specify target language use by course level. Some instructors made note of this, commenting that their use of the target language did depend on the level of the course. For the purposes of this study, teachers were asked to estimate an average among all courses taught. This study did find, however, that target language goals correlated significantly with the level of the teaching institution. On the other hand, this correlation with institution level was not significant for reported actual use. Currently, however, professional guidelines on best practices do not differ according to course level.

The broad categories of qualitative data that were created for organizational purposes were chosen subjectively. In addition, instructors may also bias estimates of target language use, taking into account the recommendations from research and teacher education programs. The fact that all respondents were attending professional development workshops when they completed the questionnaire for this study points to a positive trend in this regard. It should be noted that given this fact, the participants were perhaps more motivated than others to improve their language instruction. A limitation of the survey instrument pertains to question 5. This question is inherently biased due to the fact that it assumes the instructors surveyed are not reaching their goal for target language use. Finally, follow-up video recordings of class sessions would be necessary to verify self-reports of individual instructors. That work, however, is beyond the scope of this study and should be an area for further investigation, not only to verify self-reports,
but to also document effective teaching strategies that align with professional recommendations for target language use.

**Conclusion**

In this study, it was found that instructors’ stated goals for utilizing the target language with their students frequently exceed what they are able to achieve in practice. Some instructors mentioned feeling ‘guilty’ for not teaching more of their class sessions in the target language. The use of the target language “should be a challenge to pupils and the teacher, not a threat” (Guest & Pachler, 1997, p. 105). A classroom atmosphere wherein the target language is accepted as the normal mode of communication is desirable. To advance pre-service and in-service teacher training in this area, educators must come to realize and gain confidence in the fact that it is possible for students to comprehend and function in the L2 classroom environment that is established. Some instructors in this investigation express a need for further training and call for more opportunities for professional development to address the obstacles with which they struggle. Confidence in the acquisition process, coupled with a practical framework of techniques, can provide effective strategies for both instructors and their students. Concrete suggestions for using the target language in order to foster comprehension, production and interaction can guide instructors in achieving greater success in reaching their goals.

**References**


Appendix A

Target Language Use in the World Language Classroom: Questionnaire

1. I am currently teaching at the following level:
   High School  Middle School  Elementary School  University

2. Languages that I teach: Chinese  French  German  Italian  Japanese  Spanish  Other: ___________

3. My goal or objective for target language use in the classroom is:
   90-100%  80-90%  70-80%  60-70%  50-60%  40-50%  30-40%  20-30%

4. The actual percentage of my target language use in the classroom is:
   90-100%  80-90%  70-80%  60-70%  50-60%  40-50%  30-40%  20-30%

5. Typical obstacles that I face in reaching my goal of target language use are:

6. Additional Comments:

Appendix B

Obstacles: Representative Instructor Comments by Category

Student Factors

“confidence of students on their abilities (feeling like they must understand everything)”

“The biggest obstacle is initial student resistance.”

“Beginning learners do not understand and get frustrated. This results in loss of engagement.”

“If students feel lost or in over their heads, they will not continue with their language studies.”

Factors Beyond the Instructor’s Control

“Lack of administrative support (being told I cannot expect total immersion in a city school).”

“We begin language instruction in the 9th grade which is just too late for language acquisition.”

“Large class size seems to prohibit the use of the TL. My average class this year is 22 but I have had up to 35 students.

“pressure from administration and parents on difficulty of the class”

“Large classes, students have difficulty hearing, numbers of students and physical space”
Teacher Preparation and Training

Variety of Students
“ability level of students (non-honors, learning disabled, etc.), percentage varies between classes”
“Students come to Spanish class in mixed groups with varying levels of aptitude and/or language exposure.”
“varied ability levels in the classroom especially in the first year”

Teacher Lack of Linguistic Abilities
“personal loss of proficiency due to being out of the language”
“I don't feel confident enough.”
“inability to simplify what I want to say;”
“personal physical challenges: headaches when I speak the target language too long”
“Bringing down the level of Spanish to an appropriate level is also difficult because it's hard to explain everything.”

Lack of Time
“time-I feel I am short on time to begin with and it takes longer to speak in the TL at times (for transitions, etc.).”
“explaining course logistics (how to do activities, homework questions, etc.) explaining difficult grammar concepts”
“It takes longer to explain in target language, especially the college-prep level, sometimes it’s just easier to explain a grammar point in English and I’ll do it if I get behind and need to save some time.”
“time constraints-When students do not understand, having to explain something another way but still trying to accomplish objectives and finish the curriculum.”
“sacrificing TL due to time constraints: when giving directions, setting up group work”
“getting through the curriculum in time”
“too high expectations with too little time to meet them,”

Difficult to Establish Rapport in TL
“Losing the mentor relationship with the students is a challenge for me. Some students need L1 contact to develop a better rapport with the teacher.”
“Building relationships with lower level students in the target language is really hard.”
“finding the right balance between speaking in the target language and creating/building relationships with students”

Previous Teachers Did Not Speak in TL
“Teachers of prerequisite levels do not know how to develop this facility. They either can’t or don’t use the language enough.”
“I am a first year teacher and the previous teacher used no Spanish, so my students fight trying to understand.”
Classroom Management
“disciplining students effectively in TL, explaining abstract concepts”
“...feeling like I want to communicate more information than they have the vocabulary for; pressure of introducing ‘culture’ that needs more vocabulary”

Seeking Advice
“need new and innovative approaches”
“I would appreciate tips of remaining in the TL when managing the class.”
“It’s more difficult and I get distracted, need to make it more of a habit, routine.”
“I believe I need more strategies/activities so students feel comfortable listening to and using French.”
“ability-Sometimes I myself am unsure of how to get something across a 3rd/4th time if it didn’t work in the 1st or 2nd. “
“I run out of ideas on how to keep in target language (motivation).”
“I’m a new teacher so I’m not used to using the TL for all things.”
“I am concerned if students are understanding materials or not if I explain in TL for beginners-help!”