

Aiming for a hidden target: Needs analysis and target tasks in a Spanish Foreign Language program

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INDIANA UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Bloomington



Overview of the project

- Investigation of the needs of Spanish foreign language (FL) learners at beginning, intermediate, and upper-intermediate levels as well as heritage language learners (HLLs).
 - In a large research-oriented public university in the U.S.
 - Where the majority of courses are multi-sectional and organized around input processing models of SLA.
 - With the goal of identifying target tasks and feasibility of implementing a more task-supported program.
- We also piloted several pedagogic tasks created based on the NA.



Previous needs analyses (NAs)

SL NAs

- English as second language (SL) in Bangalore: (Prahbu, 1987)
- Flemish as a SL in Belgium: (Van den Branden, 2006; Van den Branden et al., 2011)

FL NAs

- Korean as FL in Hawaii: (Chaudron et al., 2005)
- English as FL in Thailand: (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007)
- German as a FL in USA: (Developing multiple literacies, 2000)

NA for specific purposes:

Healthcare: (Lepetit & Cichocki, 2004)

Business: (Purpura & Graziano-King, 2004)



Motivation of current NA

- FL not previously analyzed: Spanish
- Unique needs of this particular FL context may influence TBLT, e.g., geographical context & program size
 - In the U.S., Spanish is widely spoken
 - 38 million speakers (Census Bureau, 2012)
 - And widely studied
 - 790,756 students enrolled in Spanish courses in the U.S. (MLA, 2013)



Motivation of current NA

- However, Spanish is not widely spoken in the community of this university (Bloomington, Indiana)
 - Indiana: 244,772 Spanish speakers in 2010 (Census Bureau)
 - Language other than English spoken at home: 14.4% Bloomington and 8.2% in Indiana in 2009-2013 (Census Bureau)
- However it is widely studied at Indiana University (IU): 4,059 (~10%) students during academic year 2014-2015 (Indiana University Department of Spanish & Portuguese)



Research questions

- (1) What are the language needs of Spanish FL learners in a large multi-section program in the U.S.?
- (2) How do the data coincide among different sources (e.g. HL researchers, instructors, alumni, supervisors and students) and methodological instruments (e.g. questionnaires and interviews)?
- (3) How do the needs of FL and HLLs coincide and/or differ?
- (4) How can tasks be designed to accommodate these needs when the FL is not widely used in the surrounding community (but is readily present in the U.S.)?



Instructional context

Beginner (A1 on Common European Framework of Reference [CEFR]): Beginning Spanish for students who have no prior experience with the language, predominantly L1 English speakers

Intermediate (A2 - B1.2 on CEFR): Intermediate Spanish for students who have either tested into this level from high school or have completed Beginner-level Spanish, predominantly L1 English speakers

Upper-intermediate (B2.1 on CEFR): Advanced grammar course required for all Spanish majors/minors, regardless of cultural or linguistic background (includes HLLs)



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Heritage language (HL) instruction



Incorporating HL instruction

- IU did not have specific HL courses at the time of the NA- but conception of one was in progress.
- NA done to assess HLLs needs with goal of aiding the implementation of potential HL course
- Our target group:
 - Heterogeneity of HLL abilities in our context
 - Overall, our HLLs self-identify and are identified by instructors/supervisors as able to speak with relative fluency in informal contexts and have good receptive skills
 - HLLs may or may not have taken Spanish classes with FL learners



Data sources for all levels

- Current students, instructors, supervisors
- Director of the university's Basic Language Program (BLP)
- **Alumni of this institution**
- Sociolinguistics professor
- **Professionals via online questionnaires**
 - Professionals chosen according to university's statistical data report detailing number of undergraduate and graduate degrees that were conferred in 2012-2013 for each major
- Cervantes Curriculum Plan
- Heritage language researchers



Methods for levels

- Data collected mid - end of Spring 2014 semester
- Online questionnaires and surveys (students, alumni, sociolinguist, HL researchers, professionals of most common labor areas for students upon graduation).
- Semi-guided interviews (instructors, supervisors, director of BLP, students, HL researchers)
 - Sample interviews questions
 - *How could you use Spanish in your chosen profession?* (student)
 - *What communicative skills should an intermediate-level student have upon completing the course?* (instructors/supervisors)



FL level-specific results
Please refer to your handout



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Overall results



RQ #1: What are the language needs of FL learners of Spanish in this context?

- All learners: travel and tourism needs
- Intermediate: professional and academic needs
- Students could identify some specific domains but could not imagine specific needs.
- (Sample responses from intermediate-level questionnaire):
For what specific purposes would you like to use you Spanish?
 - **Using my Spanish for work/business**
 - *Communication*
 - *I need to learn how to speak the language and have a general understanding*
 - *I want to communicate fluently with the Hispanic side of my family*
 - **Use Spanish while traveling and touring**
 - *Being bilingual would be beneficial*
 - *Learn the language in an enjoyable way*



RQ #1: What are the language needs of FL learners of Spanish in this context?

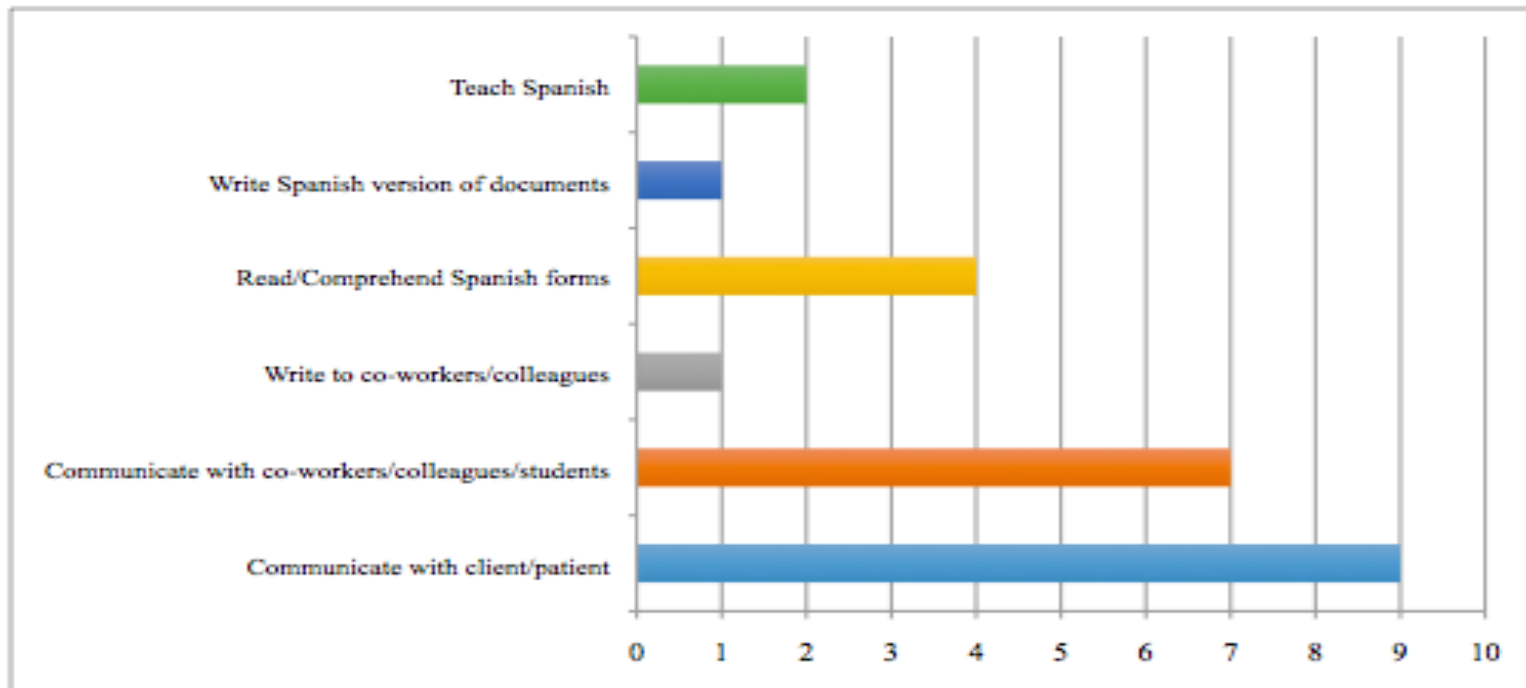
- Questionnaires (that were piloted and contained open-ended questions) were modified to include identified domains and provide options to facilitate articulation of specific needs (target tasks)
 - *In each of the following domains listed, list at least 2 to 3 activities for which you see yourself using Spanish. We have provided two examples for each situation:*
Professional:
 - ***Writing an e-mail to a co-worker/boss discussing business products***
 - ***Reading Spanish-language forms completed by Spanish-speaking clients***
- Responses still indicated a difficulty identifying specific tasks:
 - *Understand clients*
 - *Communicate with customers/ co-workers/ speak with store clerks*
 - *Performing a service in Spanish*



RQ #1: What are the language needs of FL learners of Spanish in this context?

- Some learner-identified needs did coincide with current uses of Spanish in the most common labor areas for students upon graduation.

Figure 1: Spanish language usage in the professional environment





Alumni

Alumni (N=51)

- Only 33% studied Spanish at IU, but 61% have visited a Spanish-speaking country and 88% have plans to do so.
- 27% currently use Spanish in professional career
- *“The language program [at IU] was focused on academic Spanish, we would have liked more ‘conversational’ Spanish.”*
- Alumni expressed how the university language program did not equip them to use the TL in daily life such as communicating during everyday tasks with a host family while abroad—a need not identified by current students.



RQ #2: How do the data coincide among different sources and instruments?

- Overall, when identifying these needs sources coincide, with some exceptions:
- Sources (professionals, alumni, instructors, supervisors) identified needs that current students did not:

Beginner-level:

- Need to communicate with host family abroad
- Cultural competence

Intermediate-level:

- Perceived difficulties: communicating in informal situations in a Spanish-speaking country (matches alumni's retrospective articulated needs)



RQ #2: How do the data coincide among different sources and instruments?

Upper-intermediate level:

- **Instructors and supervisor** more oriented towards course content, professional needs and formal aspects of proficiency (emphasized importance of grammatical accuracy)
- **Learners** expressed desires to use Spanish outside of the classroom in social situations and had more global view of proficiency—orientation towards fluency

HL instruction: All sources coincide

- Methodological instruments
 - All instruments generally coincided, eliciting similar information regarding learner needs
 - However, questionnaires had to be made more specific and provide examples to guide learners



RQ #3: How do the needs of FL and HLLs coincide and/or differ?

- **HLLs needs identified:**
 - **Language use:**
 - Accustomed to relatively frequent informal use of Spanish
 - Thus, there is a need for more focus on speaking and writing in more formal (e.g., professional, academic) registers.
 - **Perceived challenges:**
 - Lack of metalinguistic knowledge, formal use, affective/individual factors
 - **Identified tasks:**
 - **Academic:** Reading an article/Writing academic papers/Correcting spelling and orthographic errors in writing/Requesting a letter of recommendation/Emailing an instructor or supervisor/Making a presentation
 - **Professional:** Completing a professional application/Creating a CV/Writing a cover letter/Completing a professional interview



RQ #3: How do the needs of FL and HLLs coincide and/or differ?

- Many FL learners' and HLLs' needs coincide, however there are differences with regard to:
 - **Spanish use in everyday life & social situations**
 - FL learners need more tasks addressing these areas to improve communicative competence
 - When compared to FL learners, instructors identified HLLs' needs as:
 - Improving written proficiency
 - However, HLLs were rated (scale 1-9) higher with respect to oral proficiency and grammatical accuracy
 - Additional HLL results on handout



RQ #4: How can tasks be designed to accommodate these needs in this context?

- Must consider (future) needs articulated by students and others sources to design tasks
- For example...



Intermediate-level pedagogical task (part 1): Email from a client

Task: Congratulations on your new job! You are a salesperson working at an international language school. You have received an email from a client, and your responsibilities are: (1) identify your client's needs and (2) formulate answers to those needs.

A successful task outcome: you understand the client's needs and can formulate a response



Relevance: Task relates to students' articulated need to communicate with Spanish-speaking clients in a business setting. Focuses on understanding documents in this context.



Intermediate pedagogical task (part 2): Replying to an email from a client

Task: Based on the previous email, write an email responding to your client informing him/her about all the options the language school you work for can offer him/her based on his/her needs.

A successful task outcome: your client chooses to do business with you

Relevance: Task remains centered on use of Spanish in a business context, the focus is on synthesizing the information gained from the client's email and communicating it to the client.





Results of piloted tasks

- For this business-related task, (as well as other intermediate-level tasks that were piloted) students were able to perceive a clear connection to real-world tasks in which they would use Spanish:
 - *“My work may involve communication with people from all over the world. Researchers need to be able to communicate and have knowledge of business customs to fully convey one’s point”*
 - *“I definitely feel that these types of business related tasks are great for preparing the student for the real-world.”*



Results of piloted tasks

- Students were also able to complete all piloted tasks.
- However, carrying out the tasks was not as easy for some learners as others:
 - Many students struggled to finish the tasks in the time allowed
 - Students were unaccustomed to the independent nature of tasks

“I didn’t really know how to complete this kind of task in Spanish.” (Business letter exchange)
- Need for increased exposure to tasks to foster independent learning
- Overall, students did seem to enjoy completing the tasks



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Discussion



Discussion

- Difficulties for students in envisioning specific uses for Spanish
- These difficulties are likely related to the fact that:
 - Students are not presented with real-world tasks in the classroom - not faced with immediate need or opportunities to use Spanish outside the classroom

“...in a FL context, and contrary to a SL context, students may lack opportunities and/or pressure to put what they learnt in the classroom to proper use in the **outside world**” (Shehadeh and Coombe, 2012, p. xi)

“...in most FL contexts, most or all of the students generally share the same L1, so that in the classroom the target language is not a **lingua franca** but an additional and often unnecessary alternative medium”(Shehadeh and Coombe, 2012, p. xii).



Discussion

- In addition, students also expressed difficulties with regard to task content and logistics
- Students in our institution have almost exclusive experience with traditional teaching methods and thus are not accustomed to such a distinct focus in the classroom: completing a task with no prior instruction:

“...teaching **languages as a subject** (as is typically done in the case of foreign language teaching) may add to both learners’ and teachers’ view of the target language as an object of study, rather than as a useful means for **functional communication** or as something with direct relevance to learners’ needs” (Shehadeh and Coombe, 2012, p. xi-xii).



Discussion

- Therefore, we can see an importance of task implementation in a FL classroom for learners
- In our study, despite difficulties, the piloted pedagogic tasks show that students saw connection between classroom tasks and real-world tasks
- HLLs exhibit some differences from FL learners – thus we see a need for attention to context-specific populations in NAs



Conclusions and future directions



Conclusions

- Main challenge of this NA:
 - Overall, Spanish FL learners essentially cannot envision how specifically they might use the FL
 - While some identified domains of use (e.g. professional) coincide with current Spanish use in the most common labor areas for students upon graduation-many needs differed from that focused on by alumni, e.g. Spanish use daily life, especially in a study abroad context
 - Target population 18-22 years old: Potential difficulty imagining and articulating specific needs
- Our NA process seems to have actually *created* the needs as opposed to having identified already existing needs and the piloted tasks reinforced students' ability to imagine Spanish use in a real-world context, in addition to in a classroom setting.



Conclusions

- These results highlight the potential that a TBLT program in this FL context could have to:
 - 1) Facilitate students'
 - articulation of real-world needs for Spanish
 - recognition of connections between classroom activities and future uses of Spanish
 - 2) Address the distinct needs of FL and HLLs
- This research will support:
 - A HL course expected to be offered at IU Fall 2016
 - A current course: Spanish in the Business World
 - A prospective course targeting use of Spanish use in Healthcare 32



Future directions

- When conducting NAs:
 - Specificity of instruments seems essential when the target population has difficulty identifying not only domains of use but more so specific target tasks.
- Our NA seems to highlight the importance of:
 - Teacher training on TBLT which can benefit learners directly (not accustomed to true tasks)
 - of “FL **teachers may find it harder** [...] to point out the usefulness of certain tasks, to motivate their learners to use the target language in the classroom” (Shehadeh and Coombe, 2012)
- Demonstrating the applicability of pedagogical tasks to real life
 - Highlighting instructors’, alumni’s, future professionals’ experiences with TL
- Including learner feedback (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007)
- Addressing HLLs’ needs and creation of other HL courses is encouraged



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Beginner pedagogical task: Restaurant reservations

Task: It's been three weeks since you've started as a waiter/ess at the restaurant Casa Brava. Today, the host who takes the reservations over the phone is sick and the owner asks you to take their place! When the phone rings, listen to the information that the callers give you and make a note of it in the reservation book

Time	Names	Number of people	Other information
16:00			
17:00			
18:00			
19:00			
20:00			
21:00			

- **Relevance:** Related to the target task of ordering food (all sources), focus on comprehension (director of BLP), introduction of culture (sociolinguist) and etiquette (director of BLP)



Intermediate pedagogical task: Travel reservations

Task:* In this unit, we are going to travel to Spain! Before, you had thought you would spend a week and a half in Madrid. But now that you have arrived, you have decided to go from Madrid to Barcelona for a weekend with your friend. You are going to use the computer to look for information on the various aspects of the trip including lodging, transportation, and tourist sites. Use the places and services provided below.

¿Adónde quieres ir? ¿Cuáles son los **monumentos, museos, parques, edificios históricos** (como **palacios, iglesias, catedrales**) a los cual quieres ir?



Varios sitios turísticos famosos en España



Parc Güell, Barcelona, España

- Relevance: falls in section of course related to travel abroad; professionals and students alike cited need for Spanish in travel and study abroad situations



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Intermediate pedagogical task: “Calling Dr...” A day on the job

Task: It is your first day as a doctor. A patient is not feeling well and visits you. Both have to create a simulation where the patient is healed.

Relevance: The NA revealed that students' second professional area where they could apply Spanish to is the medical environment.

