Teacher-initiated TBLT: A 16-week case study of design and implementation in a Spanish FL classroom

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Objectives

- Principle objective: To examine how a graduate student instructor designed and incorporated TBLT into her classroom--a highly structured, multi-section intermediate Spanish FL course at a large, public research university in the United States
  - TBLT is possible, even in these settings!

- Secondary objective: To compare student perceptions in traditional (non-TBLT) and TBLT sections of this course
  - Taught by the same instructor, one semester apart

The role of the teacher in TBLT

- "Tasks do not take place in a vacuum" (Samuda, 2006, p. 379)
  - Teacher as "guide, a counsellor, and a coach who tries to motivate students to perform tasks, gives them clear instructions and supports the students' task performance, both at the cognitive and affective level, in such a way that they further develop their language proficiency" (Van den Branden, 2009, p. 401; *see also* Prabhu, 1987; Samuda, 2001; Van Avermaet et al., 2006; Willis, 1996)
  - "[…] the teacher remains a crucial interactional partner in task-based language classrooms, by taking the role of motivator (i.e. launching the students into action by constructing joint projects), organizer (making sure that students know what they are expected to do and organizing temporal and spatial aspects of task performance), and, last but not least, conversational partner and supporter, as the more proficient, knowledgeable interlocutor who can feed the language-learning needs of different students in a wide variety of ways" (Van den Branden, 2009, p. 284)

Teacher training and education

- Samuda (2006): Important for teachers to guide attention to form-meaning relationships in tasks, thus "complementing" tasks (p. 398)

- Ogilvie & Dunn (2010): Instructors' disposition toward TBLT improved after training, but implementation was infrequent in practice

- East (2013): Beginning instructors are generally positive about TBLT and its implementation

- Gurzynski-Weiss (in press): Graduate student instructors have the desire to implement TBLT following training, but need ongoing support to do so

Teacher design and implementation of classroom tasks

- Baralt, Harmath-de Lemos, & Werfelli (2014): Instructors consider institutional and classroom management issues while applying the Cognition Hypothesis to their tasks and lesson plans

- Calvert & Sheen (2015): An instructor's task-based action research study led to improvements in her design and implementation of tasks

- Gurzynski-Weiss (in press): Graduate student instructors put TBLT training to use, specifically when operationalizing task complexity and determining task sequencing

TBLT and highly structured settings

- Questions remain if TBLT is possible in large, multi-section courses that require cross-sectional standardization
  - Most likely more task-supported than task-based
  - Large research university in the US as one such context

- Is this simply a logistical concern regarding a big change, or is this genuinely a difficulty or impossibility?

Research questions

- Is it possible to implement a task-supported course in a highly structured multi-section course at a public research university in the United States, when students are familiar with other teaching methods (i.e., input processing)?

- What would this design and implementation look like?

- How would students respond?
  - How would this compare to responses in a non-TBLT (i.e., input processing) section of the same course, taught by the same instructor?

Methodology

Setting and participants

- Public research university in the Midwestern United States
    - 4,000 students enrolled in Spanish language or content courses annually
    - Highly standardized, multi-section classes

- Two sections of *Spanish Grammar in Context* ($N = 46$)
    - Required "bridge" course for Spanish minor or major
    - Majority L1 English
    - 2-3 years previous Spanish language study

- Instructor/researcher

The instructor

- L1 English

- 6 years of experience teaching college Spanish

- Doctoral candidate in Hispanic linguistics (specializing in SLA, sociolinguistics, L2 phonetics and phonology)

- Simultaneously enrolled in TBLT doctoral seminar

Materials and procedure

- Prior to the semester: Creation of the task-supported syllabus
    - Syllabus and text provided by the department → task-based edits
        - Required to maintain the linguistic items and readings for each day
        - Flexibility with what is done in class and how
    - Support of course supervisor and language program director

- During the semester
    - Explicit announcement of task-supported course, and how it will be different
    - Weekly creation of task-based lessons; portfolio tasks
    - Weekly PhD seminar in TBLT
    - Weekly meeting with collaborator to discuss/edit task-based lessons
    - Collection of student perception data and task outcomes

Materials and procedure (cont.)

- After the semester
    - Comparison of student perception and outcomes from previous semesters
    - Instructor reflective interview on the TBLT implementation; comparison of the two semesters

Findings

The syllabus

□ General description, objectives, and materials unchanged

□ Changes made to course schedule

   □ Topics and linguistic functions → Topics and *communicative* functions

      □ Added where previously nonexistent, or

      □ Modified to be more specific

         □ E.g., La descripción → Escribir un perfil descriptivo de ti mismo para subir al internet (eHarmony.com)

         □ *E.g., Description → Write a descriptive profile of yourself to upload to the internet*

The syllabus (cont.)

PROGRAMA S280 Otoño 2012 (MWF)   SGR Spanish Grammar in Review; LCMS La casa en Mango Street

Fecha	Temas y funciones lingüísticas	Léxico y/o estructuras g...	En clase	Tarea después de
Agosto Lunes 20		Vocabulario: léxicos		
Miércoles 22		Vocabulario: antónimos ... del cuento		
Viernes 24	**Cómo expresar gustos y preferencias** **Portfolio 1**	Expresiones ... Caer bien, ...		

PROGRAMA DE ESTUDIOS*
*La profesora reserva el derecho de hacer cambios según el progreso del curso
**El contenido opcional está entre corchetes

Fecha	Temas y funciones comunicativas	Léxico y/o estructuras gramaticales	En clase	Tarea después de clase
Enero Lunes 13	Describir las características físicas que le gustan o no en una pareja	Vocabulario: grupos léxicos, sinónimos y antónimos	Introducción al curso Lazos p. 22-23, 24-25	**Hacer** Lazos p. 19, Reflexiones #1-2
Miércoles 15	Expresar interés en salir con alguien por internet	Expresiones útiles: gustar, caer bien, congeniar	Repasar el vocabulario, Lazos p. 24-25. Expresiones útiles, Lazos p. 23 y 24 Revisar la tarea	**Leer** *Una carta de amor*, Lazos p. 28-31 **Hacer** Lazos p. 31-32 Después de leer preguntas (En general y En detalle)
Viernes 17	Expresar interpretaciones de gestos Completar y compartir evaluaciones del cuento	Vocabulario: los gestos	***Pruebita 1** Discusión y análisis de *Una carta de amor*, Lazos p. 31-32 Los gestos, Lazos p. 27-28	**Estudiar** SGR[1] p. 271-273 **Hacer** SGR p. 275 #4 **Estudiar** SGR p. 279 **Hacer** SGR p. 280 #7

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Instructor-designed tasks: In-class lessons

- Each lesson (minimally) contained the following components:
    - Objectives, including communicative outcome(s)
    - The task(s), following a pre-, during-, and post-task design
    - Specific symbols employed to orient students toward complexity, accuracy, or fluency

- Example 1 (beginning of semester): Compose an eHarmony profile

- Example 2 (end of semester): Compose a comic strip, based on *El lenguado*, for a younger sibling (who likes entertaining and scary stories)

See English
translation
on handout

Objetivos de hoy

- Revisar la tarea
- Escribir un pérfil descriptivo para subir a eHarmony.com
- Nota sobre los símbolos:

la fluidez   **la precisión**   **la complejidad**

Instructor-designed tasks: In-class lessons, Example 1 (cont.)

¿Quieres salir conmigo?

- Aprendiste que Javier/Penelope no te aceptó la invitación de salir el día de San Valentín. ¡Qué desesperanza!

- Menos mal, ¡hay otra opción! Decides escribir un pérfil electrónico para subir a eHarmony.com.

Instructor-designed tasks: In-class lessons, Example 1 (cont.)

¿Quieres salir conmigo?

- **Paso 1.** En parejas, discutan la información necesaria para un pérfil de páginas de citas.
  - El sexo, la orientación sexual
  - La edad
  - Descripción física
  - Actividades de interés
  - Tipo de persona (físicamente, intelectualmente, etc.) que buscas
  - ¿...?
- **Paso 2.** Individualmente, escribe un pérfil que incluya la información que hemos discutido.

Instructor-designed tasks: In-class lessons, Example 1 (cont.)

Una linguista busca pareja

- ¡Hola! Soy Avizia y me interesa conocer a un hombre bueno con ojos marrones. Prefiero alguien de más o menos la misma edad. Por mi parte, soy de altura baja y tengo cabello largo y negro. No soy hija única. Congenio bien con otros intelectuales porque en mi tiempo libre leo muchísimo. Algunos creen que esto es un aspecto raro de mi personalidad. Como soy estudiante pobre, necesito alguien que me pueda invitar a cenar muchas veces durante la semana.

¿Cuáles son las palabras descriptivas? ¿Se puede cambiar la posición de cada una de ellas? ¿Por qué sí o no?

¿Quieres salir conmigo?

- **Paso 3.** Ahora, <u>subraya</u> todas las palabras descriptivas en tu descripción escrita.

  ¿Cuáles se han puesto antes y/o después? ¿Se puede cambiar su posición? Explica.

¿Quieres salir conmigo?

- **Paso 4.** Intercambiamos descripciones.
  - ¿Qué información descriptiva le falta?
  - ¿Hay una(s) palabra(s) descriptivas que cambiarías en cuanto a su posición? Explica los cambios posibles a tu compañero/a.

Instructor-designed tasks: In-class lessons, Example 2 (cont.)

Pruebita #6

1. ¿Quiénes son los personajes principales? 2 pts.
2. ¿Qué evidencia hay en el cuento que las chicas eran buenas amigas? 2 pts.
3. ¿Qué tenían que hacer las chicas para prepararse para su aventura? 2 pts.
4. ¿Qué pasó cuando Margarita lavaba el lenguado? ¿Cómo reaccionó Johanna? 2 pts.
5. Escribe una palabra o frase sinónima para *lonche*. 1 pt.
6. Escribe una palabra o frase sinónima para *crudo*. 1 pt.

El lenguado

- Tu sobrino/primo/hermano menor no estuvo satisfecho con tu historia escalofriante anoche. Qué piel de gallina le dio! Ahora quiere escuchar otra historia y quiere ver dibujos.
  - **La tarea**: En grupos de 4, van a crear una historieta (*comic strip*) titulado *El lenguado*. Como ven en la hoja provista, sólo tienen **6 divisiones** para contar y dibujar la historia. Además, cada división debe tener **una frase** que resume su idea clave.

Instructor-designed tasks: In-class lessons, Example 2 (cont.)

1	2	3
_____	_____	_____
4	5	6
_____	_____	_____

Instructor-designed tasks: In-class lessons, Example 2 (cont.)

El lenguado y la amistad

- Las palabras de Margarita – "se me resbaló" – sugerían que se le había caído el lenguado por accidente. ¿Creen que fue un accidente? Explique, usando evidencia del cuento.
- ¿Qué creen que pasará con la amistad entre las dos chicas? ¿Van a poder reconciliarse y ser tan amigas como antes?
- ¿Han sido decepcionados por un/a amigo/a o un miembro de su familia? ¿Qué pasó? ¿Cómo están sus relaciones ahora?

Instructor-designed tasks: Portfolios

- Purpose: To review concepts (generally related to grammar) recognized as problematic for learners of Spanish during conversation

- Instructor designed portfolios targeting the reported interests of her students
  - Example 1: Leave a message for your "host mom," letting her know your afternoon plans
  - Example 2: Leave a message for your roommate, who has a hard time understanding nonnative Spanish speakers, letting her know you can't make it to dinner

Instructor-designed tasks: Portfolios, Example 1

- Overview
    - Para esta tarea, tendrás que dejarle un mensaje de voz a tu "madre anfitriona" informándole de tus planes para almorzar fuera de la casa.

- The situation
    - Estás en el extranjero y es un día típico de clase en la universidad. Es costumbre regresar a tu casa anfitriona para almorzar y descansar, pero hoy decides almorzar afuera con tus amigos. Quieres informarle a tu "madre anfitriona" de esta decisión para que no prepare ella comida extra para ti y también para que no se ofenda ella. Decides llamarle a ella por teléfono pero no contesta, así que tienes que dejarle un mensaje de voz.

Instructor-designed tasks: Portfolios, Example 1 (cont.)

◻ Evaluation

Funciones comunicativas	El criterio	Puntos
Comunicar de manera clara la razón por la llamada y su impacto potencial	Se entiende claramente la razón por la llamada, los planes alternativos y cuál sería el resultado por parte de la madre anfitriona	_____ / 12.5 puntos
Comunicar de manera apropiada la razón por la llamada e incorporar conciencia social del impacto del mensaje	El lenguaje empleado es apropiado, tomando en cuenta quién es el interlocutor y el nivel de imposición de la situación; además se notan estrategias lingüísticas para evitar una situación ofensiva con la madre anfitriona	_____ / 12.5 puntos
	Total	_____ / 25 puntos

Instructor-designed tasks: Portfolios, Example 2

Portafolio #3

- **La situación:** Estás en Madrid, donde has estado trabajando hace dos meses ya en el puesto de tus sueños. Tenías planes para cenar con tu compañero/a de cuarto, pero tuviste que quedarte tarde para terminar una tarea importante en tu lugar de trabajo. Así que no estuviste para cenar con él/ella. Todavía estás trabajando, pero decides llamarle a él/ella por teléfono. No contesta, así que tienes que dejarle un mensaje de voz explicándole qué pasó. Sabes que tu compañero/a de cuarto *tiene dificultades con entender a los no nativos de español por su acento extranjero*, así que tienes que enfocarte en ser comprendido/a mientras dejas el mensaje de voz.

Portafolio #3

- **La tarea:** Usando un programa de grabación (e.g., Audacity, Praat, o Celtie Webrecorder), graba el mensaje de voz que le dejarías a tu compañero/a de cuarto por teléfono. En ese mensaje, por lo menos debes informarle de tu situación. También se debe incluir otra información para que no esté ofendido/a.
  - **Paso 1.** Toma 2 minutos para prepararte.
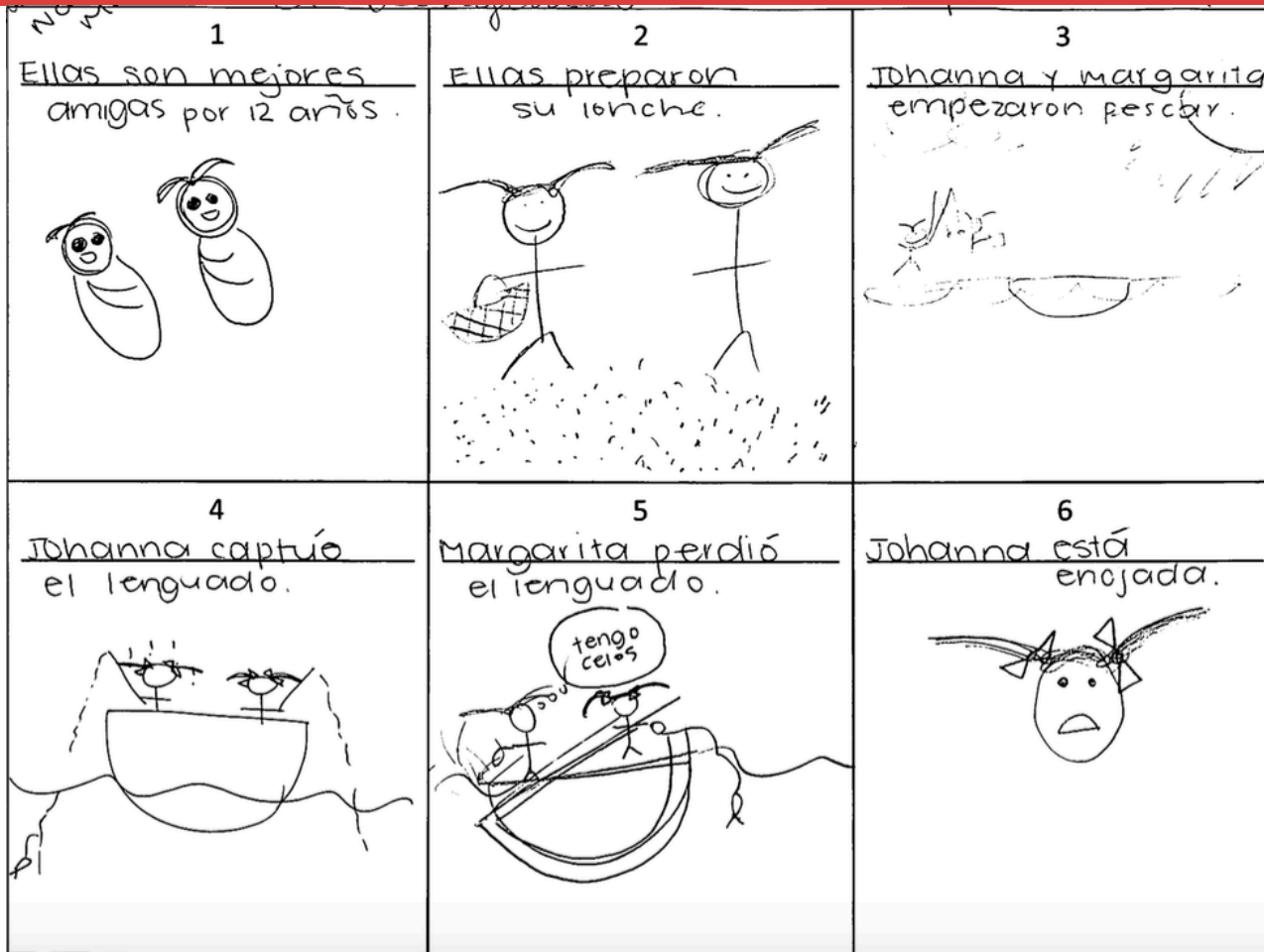 - **Paso 2.** Graba el mensaje de voz.
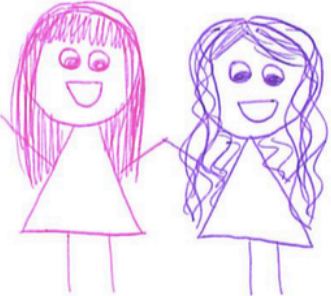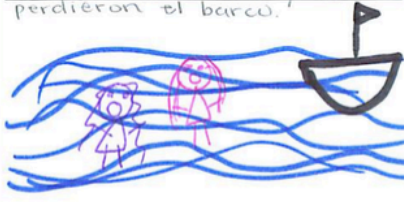
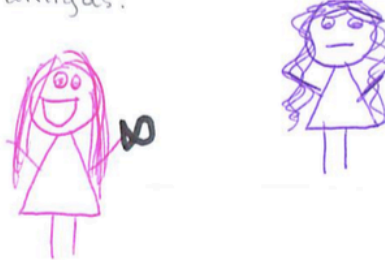# Instructor-designed tasks: Portfolios, Example 2 (cont.)

Auto-evaluación

- En general, ¿en qué te enfocabas mientras hablabas?
  - ¿En qué aspecto de la pronunciación más te enfocabas?
- En tu opinión, ¿qué aspecto de la pronunciación española más transmite un acento extranjero? Explica.
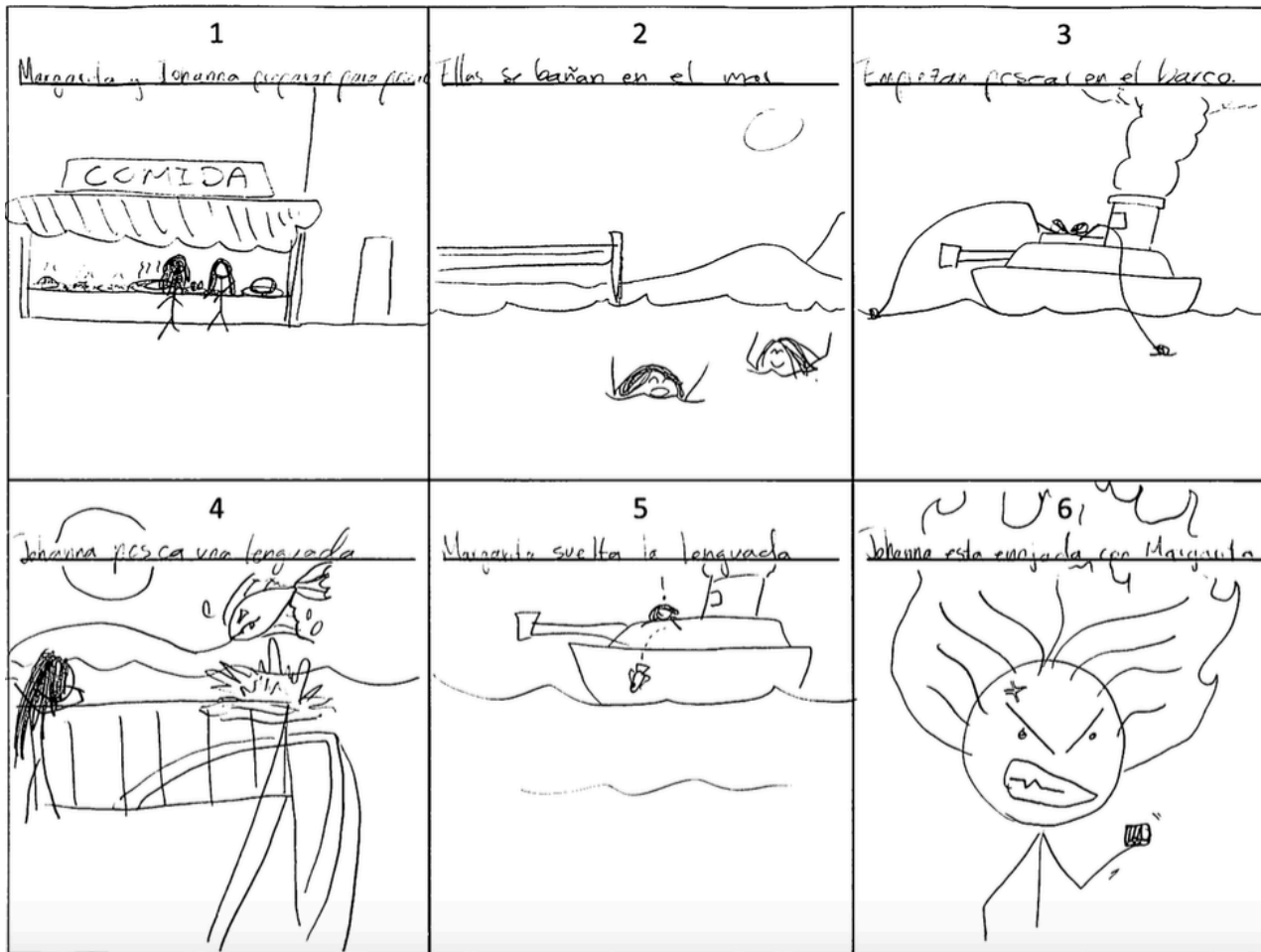
Student outcomes: In-class lessons

Student outcomes: In-class lessons (cont.)

Student outcomes: In-class lessons (cont.)

Student outcomes: Portfolios

◻ Example 1: Leave a message for your "host mom," letting her know your afternoon plans

◻ Sample 1:

◻ Sample 2:

Student perceptions of course

- Comments from student evaluations (Spring 2014)
  - "I liked the content the most in this class. I also liked group discussions."
  - "Portafolios are the most useful things in this course."
  - "I liked the way the class was taught."
  - "She was a great instructor and made the course fun, interesting, and applicable."
  - "Activities were applicative and fun."

- Comments from students evaluations (Fall 2012)
  - "I like the way the course was taught."
  - "I loved … powerpoints/teaching materials."
  - "She made annoying/boring topics more exciting to study and learn."

Instructor perceptions of the course

- Unexpectedly, students were not concerned about the discrepancy between in-class practice and traditional assessment

- It took the learners some time to adapt to the communicative outcome and stop focusing exclusively on form; heritage learners adapted immediately

- "I wanted to [implement TBLT in this course] so that at the end of the semester, instead of saying 'I know the imperfect subjunctive,' [students] could say 'I can do this in Spanish, and that in Spanish.'"

- "In the future, I would like to develop a task-based syllabus and assessments...I think it would have made the planning much more manageable I think. What slowed me down, the planning, was thinking of ideas of communicative tasks in relation to the required forms for each day."

- "Even with the traditional assessment, these were the highest averages I've seen."

Discussion, limitations, and future directions

TBLT design and implementation

- In this specific environment, very much task-*supported*
  - The most appropriate for a highly structured, multi-section course?

- Course objectives remain unchanged, but orientation to them shifted dramatically
  - A move toward full task-*based* implementation would require greater consideration of student needs and subsequent target tasks

- As with previous studies,
  - Consideration of institutional (departmental) issues (cf. Baralt et al., 2014)
  - Evidence of putting training to use (cf. Gurzynski-Weiss, in press)

Student and instructor perceptions

- Overall, students responded positively to the course
    - Students enjoy course content and tasks
    - Students recognize potential for application of course content
    - More reflection on the course than on the instructor

- Instructor perceptions
    - Higher assessment scores
    - Relationships formed between students; positive class dynamic
    - More target-language use
    - Was a challenge to implement with required department structure, but after explicit training, worked well

TBLT in this setting is possible!

- Task-supported rather than task-based as first step
  - Possible even with traditional assessment and required linguistic forms on syllabus in addition to communicative outcomes

- Instructor extremely motivated to implement TBLT
  - Typical of what has been found in other studies (e.g., East, 2013; Gurzynski-Weiss, in press); maybe a bit of an outlier ☺

- Ongoing support and training facilitated this experiment
  - "Particularly when we rely on graduate student instructors to teach language classes, we must ensure that they are simultaneously and sufficiently supported in their pedagogical formation" (Gurzynski-Weiss, in press, p. 17)

Thank you! Questions? Comments?

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