

Student Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs About Using the Target Language in the Classroom

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Abstract: *Although the language teaching profession has long emphasized the use of the target language in the classroom, student teachers face various challenges in their efforts to conduct class in their target language. This case study focused on 10 student teachers with respect to (1) their initial attitudes and beliefs about using the target language, (2) the extent to which they felt the target language could be used in specific activities, (3) the factors that affected their decisions regarding target language use, and (4) how their attitudes toward target language use evolved and changed during their student teaching. Sources of information included pre- and postquestionnaires, journal entries, and observations of student teachers' classes. Themes that emerged from student teachers' experiences are discussed, as well as possible implications for language teacher education.*

Key words: action research, input, mentoring, student teachers, target language

Language: Spanish, relevant to all languages

Introduction

Since at least the late 19th century, the foreign language teaching profession has emphasized the importance of target language use by classroom teachers (Cook, 2001). The direct method, for example, was based on the premise that optimal language learning occurs when instructors present material directly in the target language without recourse to the students' native language (L1). A half-century later, Brooks said the audiolingual method stressed "rendering English inactive while the new language is being learnt" (as cited in Cook, 2001, p. 404). More recently, the language teaching profession has underscored the importance of learning language through real communication, implying that the classroom should provide an environment in which both instructors and students use the target language much of the time.

In the last quarter-century, the push for the use of the target language by instructors has gained support from theoretical literature as well as empirical research on comprehensible input (e.g., Ellis, 1984; Gass & Madden, 1985; Krashen, 1982). Turnbull (2001) maintains that the strongest rationale for target language use by instructors is to expose learners to input, and he points out that for most foreign language students, the instructor is the main source of input. Ellis affirms that

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instructors who provide target language input of sufficient quantity and quality can approximate the kinds of input that occur in naturalistic second language development.

A number of empirical studies, reviewed by Turnbull (2001), have provided further support for target language use by examining student language learning outcomes in relation to the proportion of class time that their instructors spoke in the target language. Carroll, Clark, Edwards, and Handrick (1967) analyzed the language attainments of foreign language majors at American colleges and universities. Carroll (1975) examined the level of achievement in French of students in eight non-French-speaking countries, and Wolf (1977) examined the U.S. data from the same study. Burstall (1968, 1970) and Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen, and Hargreaves (1974) studied the French achievement of primary school students in England and Wales. Turnbull (1999) examined the achievement and proficiency of ninth grade French students in Canada. Although these studies were conducted in very different settings and at different levels of instruction, they all found a positive relationship between the amount of target language used by instructors in class and their students' achievement or proficiency in the language.

Taking a more qualitative approach to the issue, Wong-Fillmore (1985) conducted a series of studies in some 40 elementary school classrooms serving limited-English-proficient students. One of the factors that differentiated between successful and less successful classes in terms of students' language learning was the way in which the instructor used the target language. Wong-Fillmore identified a series of "characteristics of teacher talk that work as input" (p. 33), including making a clear distinction between the times when the target language is used and when the L1 is used, tailoring target language input to students' level and verifying their comprehension, making use of repeated patterns and routines, and using language that is grammatically correct and rich in vocabulary.

Use of the Target Language by Student Teachers

Despite the emphasis that the language teaching profession places on the use of the target language by instructors, the actual proportion of class time in which the target language is spoken varies greatly from instructor to instructor (Duff & Polio, 1990; Turnbull, 2001). Polio and Duff (1994) affirm that "there seems to be a 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). Student teachers in particular may not spend much time reflecting on their use of the target language if their university supervisor does not ask them to do so. Even when teacher preparation programs stress the use of the target language, student teachers may struggle to bridge the gap between what is taught in their methods classes and what they actually experience in the classroom. Teacher educators would do well to understand the attitudes and beliefs of student teachers toward use of the target language, as well as the ways in which these beliefs and attitudes evolve during this critical formative period in their careers.

Although a number of studies have examined classroom use of target language (see Turnbull & Arnett, 2002, for a review of literature on the topic), nearly all of the studies have focused on inservice teachers rather than student teachers. Nevertheless, two of these studies merit brief mention for the applicability of their findings to the present study. Duff and Polio (1990) examined 13 university foreign language instructors' use of the target language and the L1 through classroom observations and interviews. Instructors' reasons for resorting to the L1 included teaching grammar, classroom management, showing empathy and solidarity with students, avoiding unfamiliar vocabulary, and dealing with students' lack of comprehension. A similar study conducted by Franklin (1990) analyzed the survey responses of 201 teachers of French at secondary schools in Scotland. Franklin found that teachers' reasons for avoiding

the target language included the presence of low-ability students, the teachers' confidence in using the target language (including tiredness), and discipline problems.

Only three known published studies have focused specifically on the attitudes and beliefs of student teachers—as opposed to inservice teachers—regarding target language use. In a study conducted in Israel, Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) investigated the perspectives of 14 Arab and Jewish student teachers of English as a foreign language as they related to their use of the target language in the classroom. Orland-Barak and Yinon seem to take a favorable attitude toward the use of the L1, reporting that the student teachers in the study “exhibited new insights regarding the different purposes for which L1 can be used in a communicative lesson” (p. 98). These purposes included using the L1 for clarifying, enhancing pupil participation, managing aspects of the lesson, and building rapport with students. Although the goal of the study was to examine possible attitudinal disparities attributable to cultural differences between Arab and Jewish student teachers, the researchers found more similarities than differences between the two groups.

A second study, known as the Tarclindy Project (Macaro, 1997), was conducted in foreign language classrooms in England and Wales. One goal of this large-scale study was to examine the use of the target language by both student teachers and more experienced instructors in “carry[ing] out the business of lesson management and content delivery” (p. 3). Sources of information for the study included teacher interviews, questionnaires, and observation logs. Participants in the study supported using the target language for giving basic instructions, providing feedback, and to some extent, organizing classroom activities. They reported resorting to the L1 for giving instructions for pair and group activities, building relationships with students, dealing with unacceptable behavior, responding to students who seemed uncer-

tain about instructions, and coping when time was short.

The third study, also conducted by Macaro (2001), examined six student teachers of French in secondary schools in the United Kingdom in terms of the frequency of their code switching and possible reasons for it. This study was unique in that it provided detailed information on the student teachers' preparation program, which included extensive discussions of theoretical aspects of L1 and target language use in the classroom, as well as reflections by the student teachers on their own beliefs about the subject. In his study, Macaro found that the six student teachers used the L1 surprisingly little (only 4.8% of total lesson time), and that their main reasons for resorting to the L1 included providing clarification when students were confused, giving complex instructions, and dealing with discipline problems. Macaro also reported qualitative data obtained in interviews with two of the student teachers as they watched a videotape of one of their lessons. One of the student teacher's attitudes toward use of the target language appeared to be heavily influenced by government policy that “the natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern languages course” (Department of Education and Science as cited in Macaro, 2001, p. 532), while the other student teacher relied more on her own beliefs about target language use than on theory or government policy.

Although these studies yielded valuable insights on student teachers' perspectives regarding their use of the target language, neither the Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) study nor the Macaro (1997) study adopted a longitudinal perspective on the formation of student teachers' attitudes during the course of their student teaching. Macaro's 2001 study did focus partially on this issue, but it reported on only two student teachers. At present, it remains largely unclear how student teachers go about reconciling the theoretical emphasis that their methods classes place on target lan-

guage use with their own experiences in the classroom, or what conclusions they draw as they attempt to use the target language with their own students. Furthermore, it is not clear to what extent the findings of the above-mentioned studies apply to student teachers in the United States, where both foreign language study and teacher education differ markedly from those in Europe and the Middle East.

The Study

The present study sought to extend the line of research of the Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) and Macaro (1997, 2001) studies by examining a group of student teachers at a large private university in the western United States in terms of not only their attitudes and beliefs about using the target language, but how those attitudes changed and evolved during the course of their student teaching. The study primarily employed qualitative case study techniques as outlined by Merriam (1998), with the addition of a quantitative questionnaire component. The research questions for the study were as follows:

1. What are student teachers' initial beliefs and attitudes regarding their own use of the target language in the classroom?
2. To what extent do student teachers feel the target language can be used in specific classroom activities?
3. What factors do student teachers perceive as affecting their decisions regarding the use of the target language in the classroom?
4. How do student teachers' attitudes toward their use of the target language evolve and change during the student teaching experience?

Participants

The participants in the study were 10 student teachers—6 females and 4 males—whom I supervised during their 15-week student teaching experience at Brigham Young University from January through April 2007. The participants were undergraduate Spanish Teaching majors, all of whom had a

solid background in Spanish, as evidenced by their scores on the Praxis II Spanish Content Exam (ranging from 174 to 200, well above the state-mandated level of 161) and their Oral Proficiency Interview ratings (ranging from Advanced-Mid to Superior). Two of the participants were bilingual native speakers of Spanish. All had previous teaching experience of some type, although not necessarily in foreign languages.

Each of the 10 student teachers was assigned to a placement at a local middle school, junior high, or high school. Of the 10 schools, eight were located in suburban areas with a relatively homogeneous population of middle- to upper-middle-class white students; the other two were inner-city schools with a more diverse population, including a number of Hispanic students, some of whom were enrolled in Spanish classes. All of the participants completed their student teaching in a single Spanish classroom, with the exception of one student teacher who was reassigned to another school at midsemester for health reasons.

Sources of Information

Data for the study came from two main sources: (1) a questionnaire, containing both quantitative and qualitative components, which student teachers completed during the second week and the last week of the semester, and (2) four written reflections submitted by student teachers via e-mail at two- to three-week intervals throughout the semester. In addition, my own observation visits to student teachers' classes and postobservation conferences helped confirm my interpretations of the data. The participants were assured in a written consent form that the information they provided in the study would affect neither their course grade nor my final evaluation of their student teaching.

Although the relatively small sample size limited the conclusions that could be drawn from the quantitative data, involving a larger number of participants would have made analysis of the qualitative data prohibitive in terms of the size of the database

and the possibility for examining students' responses in depth. Inasmuch as the main goal of the study was to understand student teachers' attitudes and beliefs, I decided that the potential for obtaining meaningful insights from the qualitative data outweighed the statistical limitations of the sample size.

Data Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data first were analyzed separately. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were entered into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) database, and frequencies and mean ratings for each item were calculated. Paired *t* tests also were conducted to compare the pre- and postquestionnaire means for each item.

Qualitative data from the questionnaires and written reflections were used to create a textual database, which I analyzed using NVivo software according to the general procedures outlined in Merriam (1998). Predominant themes related to the research questions were identified, and the raw data were coded according to these themes. The data then were sorted by theme, allowing me to synthesize the participants' comments about each theme.

Finally, I examined the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses together and wrote an interpretation of the findings. As is often the case in writing research reports, many of the most valuable insights came during the writing process itself.

Researcher Biases

Before concluding this discussion of the data analysis, it seems appropriate to make explicit my own biases as a researcher. Although I agree that there are legitimate uses for L1 in the classroom, as pointed out by authors such as Atkinson (1993), Chambers (1991), Cook (2001), and Macaro (2001), my own experience observing student teachers suggests that those who strive to maximize their use of the target language tend to be more successful as instructors than those who do not. Their

lessons seem to be better prepared and more focused (perhaps because communicating concepts in the target language often requires advance planning); the teachers seem to have higher expectations for their students; and the students appear to have better listening comprehension, at least in terms of understanding the teachers' target language speech, than students whose teachers conduct class primarily in the L1. These observations over the years were a key factor in my decision to conduct this study and undoubtedly have influenced my interpretations of the data.

Results

Initial Beliefs and Attitudes Regarding the Use of the Target Language

The first research question sought to gain an understanding of student teachers' initial beliefs and attitudes regarding their own use of the target language in the classroom. Most of this information came from the prequestionnaire and the student teachers' first written reflections. The questionnaire contained the following prompt:

Not everyone agrees on the extent to which foreign language teachers should speak in the target language in their classes. Some people maintain that teachers should speak in the target language nearly all the time, while others argue that it is neither possible nor desirable to do so. What are your own feelings about speaking in Spanish in your classroom?

In response to this prompt, five of the 10 student teachers wrote that the teacher should use the target language "as much as possible" in order to provide the comprehensible input necessary for language acquisition. Jennifer¹ affirmed, "I believe that it is ideal to get to a point where all, or nearly everything is taught in the target language" (prequestionnaire). Lindsay added, "If we shoot for 100%, teachers are more likely to speak the [target language] the majority of the time, giving students the needed input. I think it's just as easy

as speaking English, and is better for the students" (prequestionnaire).

Student teachers listed a variety of learning outcomes that they believed were furthered by the teacher's use of the target language, including improved listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and even speaking ability. In her first written reflection, Maren asserted:

I believe that students need the experience of hearing the target language actually spoken to develop good listening skills. This also influences all other skills, particularly their speaking skills. When one listens in a foreign language, it is easier to think and respond in that language. Although students will not always respond in Spanish when spoken to in Spanish, it is more likely than when they are spoken to in English. (Maren, reflection 1)

Lindsay mentioned another benefit that she discovered in using the target language. She felt that speaking Spanish to her students increased her credibility as a teacher:

I feel like the students respect me as more of a "demanding teacher" than just some student. I think that when I'm in front of them using the language, they see me as someone who knows what they're talking about. I've fooled them! Maybe if I spoke more English, they wouldn't think I could speak Spanish at all . . . and then wouldn't believe I had anything to teach them. (Lindsay, reflection 1)

Quantitative data from the prequestionnaire also indicate support for using the target language. In response to the question "If you were to set a goal to speak in the target language more than you currently do, what percentage of the time would it be?" the responses of nine of the 10 student teachers ranged between 70% and 95% of the time. The remaining student stated a goal of speaking Spanish 50% of the time in her Spanish 1 classes.

In summary, all 10 student teachers expressed the belief that it is both desirable and necessary for teachers to maximize their use of the target language in order to provide optimal input for language learning. For some of the student teachers, however, this belief was attenuated during the course of the semester, as will be seen later.

Attitudes Toward the Use of the Target Language in Classroom Activities

The second research question focused on the extent to which student teachers felt the target language could be used in specific classroom activities. This information was drawn largely from the pre- and postquestionnaires. Both questionnaires presented student teachers with a list of 15 classroom activities, accompanied by the following instructions:

Picture what you would consider to be an excellent junior high or high school *Spanish 2* class (second-year Spanish)² that is taught by a skilled teacher. (This may be a real teacher that you have observed or a mental composite of several different teachers.) For each of the following activities, indicate whether you envision the teacher conducting the activity *nearly all in Spanish, mostly in Spanish, about half Spanish/half English, mostly in English, or nearly all in English.*

Table 1 shows the results of these pre- and postquestionnaire comparisons, with the items ranked from highest to lowest in terms of what portion of the time student teachers felt the target language should be used in each activity. In general, the activities that student teachers felt should be conducted in the target language were those that involved regular routines, such as warmup activities and correcting homework, and those in which the content was already in the target language, such as teaching vocabulary and working with reading and listening materials. Conversely, the activities in which student teachers felt

TABLE 1

**Student Teachers' Perceptions of the Ideal Balance
Between L1 and Target Language in Specific Classroom Activities**

Activity	Frequency of Response						Mean*
		Nearly all in English	Mostly in English	Half Spanish, Half English	Mostly in Spanish	Nearly all in Spanish	
Teaching new vocabulary	Pre:	0	0	1	6	3	4.2
	Post:	0	0	1	2	7	4.6
Starting class/conduct- ing daily routines	Pre:	0	0	1	1	8	4.7
	Post:	1	0	1	1	7	4.3
Correcting students' work as a class (quiz- zes, homework, etc.)	Pre:	0	0	3	6	1	3.8
	Post:	0	1	2	5	2	3.8
Conducting preread- ing or prelistening activities	Pre:	0	1	3	6	0	3.5
	Post:	0	2	0	7	1	3.7
Giving instructions for classroom activities	Pre:	1	0	2	7	0	3.5
	Post:	0	1	2	7	0	3.6
Asking questions to check students' reading or listening comprehension	Pre:	0	2	4	3	1	3.3
	Post:	1	1	1	5	2	3.6
Debriefing with the whole class after pair- or small-group activities	Pre:	0	0	4	6	0	3.6
	Post:	1	0	4	4	1	3.4
Explaining grammar concepts	Pre:	0	2	4	4	0	3.2
	Post:	0	3	4	1	2	3.2
Engaging in casual conversation/building rapport with students	Pre:	0	1	5	3	1	3.4
	Post:	1	1	5	2	1	3.1
Presenting informa- tion about the target culture	Pre:	0	0	5	5	0	3.5
	Post:	1	2	3	4	0	3.0**
Discussing cultural issues as a class	Pre:	0	2	6	2	0	3.0
	Post:	0	4	2	4	0	3.0
Explaining instruc- tions for assignments or projects	Pre:	0	2	2	6	0	3.4
	Post:	0	4	5	1	0	2.7**
Providing clarification when students don't understand in Spanish	Pre:	0	5	3	2	0	2.7
	Post:	1	3	6	0	0	2.5
Giving individual help to students	Pre:	0	4	4	2	0	2.8
	Post:	2	4	3	1	0	2.3
Dealing with disci- pline problems	Pre:	3	6	1	0	0	1.8
	Post:	5	3	2	0	0	1.7

* Means were calculated as follows: Nearly all in English = 1; Mostly in English = 2; Half Spanish, half English = 3; Mostly in Spanish = 4; Nearly all in Spanish = 5

** Pre- and postquestionnaire difference is statistically significant ($p < .10$)

using the L1 was necessary were those that involved complications that arose during instruction, such as providing clarification when students didn't understand, providing individual help to struggling students, and addressing discipline problems.

A comparison between answers in the prequestionnaire and those in the postquestionnaire using a paired *t* test revealed significant changes³ ($p < .10$) during the course of the semester in student teachers' responses for two of the activities. Ratings for the item "Explaining instructions for assignments or projects" showed a significant decrease ($t(9) = 2.09$; $p = .07$) from the prequestionnaire ($M = 3.4$; $SD = .84$) to the postquestionnaire ($M = 2.7$; $SD = .68$), indicating that by the end of the semester, most student teachers had decided that it was realistic to use the target language for this activity only half the time or less. Inasmuch as none of the participants mentioned this issue specifically in their questionnaires or journals, the reason for the decrease is unclear; perhaps it simply indicates that student teachers gained a greater appreciation for the challenges of conveying complex instructions in the target language.

The other item that yielded changes in student teachers' responses, "Presenting information about the target culture," decreased significantly ($t(9) = 2.24$; $p = .05$) from the prequestionnaire ($M = 3.5$; $SD = .53$) to the postquestionnaire ($M = 3.0$; $SD = 1.05$). Possible reasons for this decrease, as well as for student teachers' ranking of the activities in general, will be discussed in the following section.

Factors Affecting Student Teachers' Decisions About Using the Target Language

The third research question sought to identify the factors that student teachers perceived as affecting their decisions regarding the use of the target language in the classroom. From the participants' questionnaires and written reflections, four groups of factors were identified: those relating to (1) themselves as student teachers,

(2) their students, (3) the subject matter being discussed, and (4) their mentor teachers. Each of these groups will be discussed separately.

Factors Related to Student Teachers Themselves

On the whole, the student teachers seemed acutely aware of their own limitations as developing teachers, and many commented at length on the factors that inhibited their ability to teach in the target language. Although a number of factors were mentioned, six were particularly salient in participants' questionnaires and written reflections, indicating concerns about (1) classroom management, (2) lack of time, (3) linguistic limitations of nonnative teachers, (4) teacher fatigue, (5) building rapport with students, and (6) avoiding unfamiliar vocabulary.

Classroom Management

One factor that greatly contributed to some student teachers' avoidance of the target language was the concern that they would lose control of the class if they refused to speak in the L1. This concern was evident in responses to the questionnaire item "Dealing with discipline problems"; pre- and postquestionnaire ratings for this activity were 1.8 and 1.7, respectively, indicating the belief that it should be done "mostly in English" or "nearly all in English." The comments of the 5 participants who mentioned this theme in their written reflections demonstrate the intensity of this concern:

Another thing that makes teaching in the target language difficult is classroom management. As a student teacher I feel I am at a disadvantage because the students know that I am new and inexperienced. They don't give me the attention that they give their regular teacher. (Samuel, reflection 1)

My first-year Spanish classes are very large and sometimes hard to manage. There are many talkers and Daddy's little Princesses. They are good kids, but

lack the desire to learn the language. Many talk back to me and question my authority. (Jason, reflection 1)

Sometimes I explain an activity, and give the instructions . . . in Spanish (just like [my mentor teacher] does), and then say "Go," but no one moves. I'll tell them to find a partner and they just stare at me. . . . It is so frustrating. I can't figure if it's a language problem, or if they just don't want to move, or if they're not paying attention. At that point, I break down and give it in English and just try desperately to get them to work. (Lindsay, reflection 2)

One student teacher indicated that her mentor teacher had asked her to focus on classroom management *instead* of using the target language:

Unfortunately, I believe that I use less Spanish now than I did at the very beginning of the semester. I think that this is because I am trying to learn how to handle classroom management, and my mentor teacher suggested that I focus on that instead of how much Spanish I am using in the classroom. (Jennifer, reflection 2)

Lack of Time

Five participants identified time limitations as a factor that inhibited their use of the target language. Student teachers reported that using the target language, as opposed to the L1, demanded more class time as well as more advance preparation:

One thing that sometimes prevents me from doing things always in the target language is time. This includes both the time of preparation that I would need to take, as well as the extra time that it takes in class to do things in the target language. (Jennifer, reflection 1)

The difficulty in staying in "Spanish mode" is when the students ask ques-

tions in English or look like they do not understand, or if I am running out of time with the activity. (Ashley, reflection 2)

Linguistic Limitations of Nonnative Teachers

Another factor related to student teachers' confidence is an awareness on the part of nonnative teachers of their linguistic limitations. Two participants remarked that as nonnative speakers, they sometimes felt uncomfortable using the target language, especially for "extended or deep discourse," in Maren's words. In addition, 2 participants mentioned feeling embarrassed about their lack of knowledge of the target language when they had native-speaking students in their classes. The following comment from Lindsay is especially poignant:

I have about a month left student teaching, and [my mentor teacher] wanted to do a student survey. . . . I was really disturbed (for lack of a better word) by one of my student's responses . . . She is a heritage learner, and . . . I've always had the feeling she didn't like me much. She said that I often use the wrong vocabulary, or I make words up (I don't make things up, though!), and it confuses her. . . . Reading her response was a huge confidence killer. I have other heritage learners in my classes, and they all had positive comments, but when I came back to teach her class, I was VERY aware of her comments. . . . I can't express strongly enough how self-conscious I am using Spanish now. (Lindsay, reflection 4)

Teacher Fatigue

One participant reported that using the target language required extra effort on her part, and at times she was simply too tired to put forth that effort:

It is 90 degrees in my room, constantly! There are no windows, and the fans just circulate hot air. With 30 bodies in there, no one wants to

work. I'm cranky and tired and so are the kids. I don't know if this has anything to do with the target language, but after 15 minutes in there, using Spanish is the LEAST of my concerns. I'm trying to avoid passing out and keep the kids' heads up. (Lindsay, reflection 3)

Another student teacher suggested that teacher fatigue could be avoided by limiting use of the target language to certain activities:

I think a really big part of using Spanish in the classroom is doing it consistently, and if you are going to do it consistently, you need to find a way to do it that isn't too draining. If you overdo it with first period and are exhausted by last period, it's not fair to the students. Therefore, I think it's better to find established patterns that work, like some parts that you always do in Spanish (like welcoming the class) and some things that you always do in English (like explaining grammar). (Becky, reflection 2)

Building Rapport With Students

At least one student teacher placed high priority on building rapport with his students, and felt that he was unable to do so effectively in the target language:

As a student teacher I have always wanted to be myself when I taught. It is difficult to be yourself as a person or as a teacher when communication is limited due to a language barrier. At times I have turned to speaking English in order to make connections with my students, so that I could find things we related to. When I speak in Spanish my students get the feeling that I mean business and that fun time is over. (Samuel, reflection 2)

Although only 1 participant commented on this topic, I observed other student teachers conversing with their classes in English about their interests and activities,

suggesting that they may share Samuel's concerns about their ability to make connections with students in the target language. Quantitative results from the questionnaires support this conclusion; the item "Engaging in casual conversation/Building rapport with students" had mean pre- and postquestionnaire ratings of 3.4 and 3.1, respectively, indicating that student teachers felt the need to use the L1 for this activity at least some of the time.

Avoiding Unfamiliar Vocabulary

Another participant expressed the apparent belief that teachers should limit their target language use to vocabulary items that their students have "officially" learned:

I can't say "You need to do this or that" in Spanish because I am positive that the students don't know the word "need." In fact (my supervising teacher blames this on block scheduling), they don't really remember much of anything they've already learned. . . . Most don't remember *lápiz* [pencil] or *pluma* [pen], some don't remember *libro* [book], and almost none of them remember *papel* [paper]. Lack of useable vocabulary has been a great obstacle to me using more Spanish in the classroom. (Becky, reflection 2)

Ironically, the meanings of many of the words mentioned by this student teacher could have been conveyed quite easily in Spanish simply by holding up the objects in question. Instead, as I observed this student teacher's classes, she frequently resorted to code switching, in which she would make a statement primarily in Spanish with English words thrown in for unfamiliar vocabulary items (or conversely, a statement primarily in English with familiar Spanish words thrown in). Other student teachers, in addition to code switching, often would make a statement in the target language and immediately repeat it in English when they judged that it contained unknown vocabulary. Although the practice of avoiding unfamiliar words finds little

support in the literature, it seemed to be quite salient in the belief systems of some student teachers.

Factors Related to Students

The second group of factors influencing student teachers' decisions about using the target language pertained to the limitations of their students. These factors included limitations in students' language level, cognitive development, and motivation level.

Limitations in Students' Language Level

Five participants pointed out that it was more difficult for them to use the target language with beginning students than with more advanced students. The following quotes exemplify their views:

How advanced my students are makes it easier or [more] difficult to speak Spanish. I have tried speaking Spanish for longer periods of time in my Spanish 1 [class] and the students got confused. I ended up reteaching that portion in English. (Peter, reflection 2)

As students reach higher levels of language ability, it becomes easier to spend more and more time in Spanish. (Jennifer, reflection 2)

Limitations in Students' Cognitive Development

Another limiting factor that participants mentioned in relation to their students was the level of students' cognitive development. One participant, Maren, emphasized that her junior high students lacked the cognitive ability to work extensively with abstract concepts such as grammar:

Teenage minds also are not proficient with abstract concepts and grammar lessons are clearly abstract on many levels. . . . It is important to use all resources available and L1 should not be ignored as it is the most efficient form of communication. (Maren, reflection 3)

Maren also affirmed that her students' cognitive development affected their attention span:

The attention span of junior high school students is not sufficient to maintain concentration in a foreign language without some relief. (Maren, reflection 2)

When I see students getting worn out, I utilize more English to keep them engaged. (Maren, prequestionnaire)

Another way in which students' developmental level is manifested is in their ability to retain the material learned. Becky, who was quoted earlier, lamented her students' inability to remember the words for simple classroom objects. John echoed her sentiments:

As a general rule, my students do not do a very good job of retaining things that they have previously learned, so when I use words that they knew at some point, they no longer remember what they mean. They convince themselves that they don't understand what I am saying to them. (John, postquestionnaire)

One implication of students' differing developmental levels is that they learn at different speeds. Becky commented on this fact:

One of my biggest problems with using Spanish to conduct class seems to be that it just accentuates the gap between the students who catch on quickly and the ones that struggle more. There is always a gap between the students who have it all figured out before you've even finished the first explanation and the ones who need to hear something explained three different ways before they have it sorted out in their minds, but then if I'm explaining it in Spanish it gets worse. The top students have still figured it out just as quickly, while now the students who catch on slower

don't even know what they're supposed to have figured out. (Becky, reflection 3)

Lack of Student Motivation

Seven participants identified a lack of student motivation as a factor that limited their ability to use the target language. Some felt that their students resisted their efforts to conduct the class in the target language:

If the students are motivated, it makes it easier to stay in the target language. If the kids are slackers, they really seem to fight it, at least at first. (Jennifer, prequestionnaire)

When I try to use the language they shut down and resist my efforts. (Samuel, reflection 1)

One student teacher saw her students' inability to see the usefulness of learning a language as a cause of their lack of motivation:

There are always certain kids that I seem to lose. It's hard when they're not all motivated to learn Spanish or don't see the immediate need for its use. (Jennifer, reflection 3)

Another student teacher lamented that he had approximately five unmotivated students in each of his classes, and these students affected the attitude of the entire class:

They always ask "Why can't everyone learn English!!" or "Why do you speak in Spanish so much?" They are the tough ones to reach, and they can really influence the learning or lack thereof with the other kids. (Jason, reflection 1)

Before leaving this discussion of student-related factors, it should be pointed out that many of the participants felt that their students' limitations in language skill, developmental level, or motivation caused the students to become bored, distracted, or discouraged, or to give up entirely:

Generally speaking, they don't seem to understand a word of what I say to them in Spanish, and even when I try to restate things in different ways, they seem like they are already discouraged and don't even try to understand. (John, reflection 1)

Reining in bored or distracted kids is already a trick. . . . A teacher really cannot afford to lose their attention for more than a few seconds, especially if it leads to loss of confidence. Kids this age internalize failure quickly and give up until something easier comes along. When a child becomes confused at the start of a lesson with something as simple as getting the directions, he or she may opt out altogether until the next activity. (Maren, reflection 3)

It is not surprising that student teachers frequently reacted to their students' boredom or discouragement by abandoning their efforts to speak the target language and switching to English.

Factors Related to the Subject Matter

In addition to teacher-related and student-related factors, participants felt that the subject matter itself affected their ability to conduct class in the target language. They identified two subjects, grammar and culture, which they felt should be taught at least partly in English. In relation to teaching grammar, participants' mean response of 3.2 on both the pre- and postquestionnaires indicates a desire for a balance between the L1 and the target language. Qualitative responses from the five student teachers who specifically mentioned the teaching of grammar indicated that all five felt the need to use at least some English for this activity. The following quote is representative of their comments:

I still find that grammar lessons are best done bilingually. . . . Overall, the students learning the concepts is the most important goal and when they

do not understand my instruction in Spanish, it is my responsibility to get that through to them using whatever tool is best, i.e., English. (Maren, reflection 2)

Similarly, participants felt that the teaching of culture required at least some English. As explained previously, the mean pre- and postquestionnaire ratings for the item "Presenting information about the target culture" decreased significantly from 3.5 to 3.0. The other item dealing with culture, "Discussing cultural issues as a class," had a mean rating of 3.0 on both the pre- and postquestionnaires. These ratings seem to indicate a felt need for mixing the L1 and the target language, which apparently intensified for some student teachers as the semester went on. Three participants commented on this theme, expressing the belief that "culture is too complex to teach without the use of English" (Peter, reflection 2). The following observation by Maren is informative:

We have been discussing cultural aspects this week to do with surface culture and deeper culture. We have been discussing the quote from the Holocaust museum, "Thou shalt not be a victim; thou shalt not be a perpetrator; above all, thou shalt not be a bystander." Such deep concepts are hard to convey in extended discourse without a two-way conversation. . . . As I tried to maintain this discussion in Spanish, the students became bored with it until I switched to English and was able to communicate on a level more suitable to their needs for this type of theme. (Maren, reflection 2)

Factors Related to the Mentor Teacher

Participants identified a single factor related to their mentor teachers that affected their own use of the target language: the teachers' customary use of the target language or lack thereof. Seven of the 10 participants attributed much of their difficulty in using the target language to the fact (or percep-

tion) that their mentor teacher spoke in English most of the time. They arrived at this conclusion relatively early on in their student teaching:

I am having a difficult time teaching in Spanish because my students have not been taught that way in the past. (Samuel, reflection 1)

It is easier to speak Spanish in the classroom when the students are accustomed to hearing Spanish. When students have been babied and are used to mostly English, they really balk. (Maren, reflection 1)

At least one student teacher felt that she should subordinate her own use of the target language to the routine of her mentor teacher, which was largely conducted in English:

When it's not my own classroom, I think it's better not to vary too much from what their regular teacher does in class. (Becky, prequestionnaire)

How Student Teachers' Attitudes Toward Their Use of the Target Language Evolved

The final research question examined the ways in which the participants' attitudes toward their use of the target language evolved throughout their teaching experience. As might be expected, student teachers' attitudes changed in various ways based on their individual experiences and their perceptions of those experiences.

In addition to the questionnaire item that asked student teachers, "If you were to set a goal to speak in the target language more than you currently do, what percentage of the time would it be?" a second item asked them, "What percentage of your total class time would you estimate that you currently speak in Spanish?" Table 2 shows a pre- and postquestionnaire comparison of participants' responses.

Although these responses represent rough estimates on the part of student teachers (and may bear little resemblance

TABLE 2

Pre- and Postquestionnaire Comparisons of Student Teachers' Current and Goal Use of the Target Language

Student Teacher	Percentage of the Time You Currently Speak in the Target Language		Goal for Percentage of Time Speaking in the Target Language	
	Prequestionnaire	Postquestionnaire	Prequestionnaire	Postquestionnaire
Ashley	35	60	70	90
Peter	80	90	*	95
Maren	95	95	95	95
Leticia	80	80	85-90	95
Lindsay	80	80	90	90
Jason	80-90	50-60	90	90
Samuel	60	50	80	80
Jennifer	25	20	50	40 now; 75 later
Becky	5	20	85	75
John	60	15	80	50

**Did not respond*

to their actual level of target language use), when taken together with the qualitative data, they help provide a picture of student teachers' perceptions of their current use of the target language, their goals for using the target language, and how those perceptions changed over the course of the semester.

Two of the participants, Ashley and Peter, had remarkable success in using the target language, and subsequently revised upward both their current and goal target language estimates. Both participants felt that their use of the target language resulted in positive outcomes for their students:

I decided to try different motivation strategies and although it was difficult and the students were frustrated at times, I feel that the students felt good about their increased knowledge of Spanish. (Ashley, postquestionnaire)

My original feeling was that Spanish did not need to be used exclusively. I now am able to use Spanish and feel comfortable that the students can

learn. Students learn a lot and become more motivated when they see me use Spanish. (Peter, postquestionnaire)

It is interesting to note that while Peter's mentor teacher used the target language extensively, Ashley's used it only infrequently, demonstrating that the mentor teacher is just one of many factors influencing student teachers' decisions about using the target language.

A second pair of student teachers, Maren and Leticia, each of whom had previous experience teaching Spanish, reported on their prequestionnaires that they already used the target language the vast majority of the time. At the end of the semester, they reported little change in the percentage of the time they spoke in the target language, but both reported feeling more confident in deciding when and when not to use the language:

[My feelings about using the target language] are the same. We should use the target language as much as possible. However, there are times

when you need to switch. You know when it's the time, it's very personal. (Leticia, postquestionnaire)

My feelings have not changed. I have, however, found how and when to be easier to decide than before, and that the when is more often than I had previously thought possible. (Maren, postquestionnaire)

A third group, consisting of Lindsay, Jason, Samuel, and Jennifer, reported that their goals for using the target language had not changed, but their perceptions of their ability to meet those goals had decreased somewhat. Among the factors they mentioned as having limited their success in using the target language were their mentor teachers' lack of target language use, their students' lack of motivation, and an increased awareness of the realities of teaching:

My feelings toward the importance of full-time use of the target language in the classroom haven't changed. I do have a better picture of how hard it can be to keep it up on a consistent basis though. So much more patience and preparation go into it and I found it hard to speak 100% of the time because of so many complaints from the students. (Jason, postquestionnaire)

I still believe that 100% is a good goal for all teachers, and that it is nearly impossible. . . . There are so many more factors that I'm aware of now . . . I'm more aware of the real world and less idealistic. I get tired. My classroom is constantly 90 degrees. Spring Break starts tomorrow. Nothing is perfect. . . . I used to think it was almost an attainable goal. Not any more. (Lindsay, postquestionnaire)

The last pair of participants, Becky and John, found it difficult to use the target language in their classrooms, and subsequently lowered their reported goals for tar-

get language use. By the end of the semester they seem have to concluded that using the target language was not an especially high priority. Becky affirmed:

I think it depends on the teacher's goals for his/her class. If the teacher wants the students to develop communicative ability, then the teacher must provide lots of input in the language . . . HOWEVER, there is no requirement for a Spanish teacher to have communicative ability as a goal for his/her students. There are other important objectives for teachers to balance along with communicative ability. (Becky, postquestionnaire)

John's attitude changed even more dramatically. His reported target language use dropped from 60% to 15% of the time, his goal dropped from 80% to 50%, and by the end of the semester he felt that all the activities on the questionnaire should be conducted "mostly in English" or "nearly all in English." John wrote:

I have found that my efforts to speak Spanish to the class have become quite half-hearted as the semester has worn on. I suppose that I have wearied of [my students] not putting forth any effort to understand . . . and now I often do not make much of an effort to speak Spanish to them in the first place. This has not been an intentional decision on my part so much as it has been the result of a lack of commitment or dedication to the cause of exclusive (or near exclusive) L2 [second language] use. (John, postquestionnaire)

Discussion

In terms of the activities that student teachers feel comfortable conducting in the target language, as well as the factors that influence them to switch to using the L1, the findings of this study to some extent echo those of previous studies (Macaro, 1997, 2001; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005). Student teachers tend to feel comfortable

conducting daily routines and giving basic instructions in the target language. Factors that limit their use of the target language include student confusion, discipline problems, lack of time, and the desire to build rapport with students in the L1.

Although the study identified factors that are clearly related to student teachers' use of the target language, it also demonstrated the difficulty of predicting how individual student teachers will react to those factors. At the beginning of the semester, all 10 participants indicated support for speaking the target language in the classroom; as the semester continued, however, a certain amount of wavering occurred in student teachers' belief in the importance of using the target language, their own ability to use it, or both. Some student teachers, when confronted with unanticipated challenges to their use of the target language, found ways of addressing the challenges; others seem to have become discouraged in their attempts to use the target language, and in some cases even abandoned those attempts.

In general, it appears that one overriding issue for many student teachers is a lack of confidence in their ability to conduct class in the target language. Although none of the participants specifically mentioned confidence as an issue, it is clearly related to concerns such as classroom management, dealing with discipline problems, addressing complex subject matter, and speaking in front of native students. Many student teachers appeared to worry about losing control of their class or frustrating their students if they spoke in the target language. Previous studies likewise have identified a lack of confidence as an obstacle to teachers' use of the target language (e.g., Franklin, 1990).

A second issue seems to be student teachers' lack of knowledge about or skill in using techniques for making themselves understood in the target language. The avoidance of teaching culture or grammar in the target language, frequent code switching, and immediate translation of target language statements to the L1 seem

indicative of a gap between student teachers' goals of maximizing their target language use and their knowledge of how to reach those goals. Again, previous studies (e.g., Polio & Duff, 1994) have postulated that teachers' resorting to using the L1 suggests a lack of strategies or skills for making their target language speech comprehensible to their students.

Implications for Language Teacher Education

Although some of the factors identified by this study are beyond student teachers' control (such as their students' developmental levels and their mentor teachers' use of the target language), there are many things student teachers can do to increase their own use of the target language and that of their students. A number of authors (e.g., Chambers, 1991; Duff & Polio, 1990; Taylor & Luckau, 1996) have offered suggestions on how to maximize target language use. Many of their suggestions can be addressed to some extent in methods courses and inservice seminars for student teachers.

One way of increasing preservice teachers' confidence in conducting classes in the target language is to help them anticipate possible resistance from students and consider ways to deal with that resistance. For example, student teachers can discuss with their students their rationale for conducting class in the target language and the benefits in terms of language learning. They can explain that the students will not be expected to comprehend every word, but should strive to understand the general meaning of what the teacher says, much as they would do if they were sojourners in a country in which the target language is spoken.

Teacher educators can introduce student teachers to techniques that support the use of the target language as the language of the classroom. Taylor and Luckau (1996) suggest many useful techniques, including using the target language for daily routines such as welcoming the class, conducting warmup activities, or correcting homework, as well as having clear pro-

cedures for differentiating between times when the target language and the L1 will be used, such as a sign with the word *Español* [Spanish] written on one side and the word English written on the other. Furthermore, student teachers can be asked to consider techniques for promoting the use of the target language by students, such as teaching common classroom expressions and questions in the target language, and posting these expressions on the wall or providing students with a "coping card" containing the expressions. Student teachers also may benefit from a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of various types of reward systems for students' efforts to speak in the target language.

Preservice and inservice courses also should include discussion as well as demonstration of techniques that teachers can use to convey meaning in the target language without resorting to the L1. These techniques could include the use of concrete objects, pictures, gestures, examples, and comparisons. Prospective teachers should have the opportunity to observe experienced instructors who use these techniques successfully, especially in teaching complex subject matter such as grammar or culture.

Perhaps most importantly, both university supervisors and mentor teachers can assist student teachers in their efforts to conduct their own classes in the target language. They can provide support to student teachers in identifying situations in which specific theories and techniques can be applied, as well as in planning ways to make lesson content understandable in the target language. They also can help student teachers think through the challenges they may face in using the target language and consider ways of addressing those challenges.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

The small number of participants already has been mentioned as a limiting factor in this study, at least in terms of the statistical analyses. A second possible limitation is the

degree to which the findings can be generalized to other settings, particularly in the less commonly taught languages, in which it may be much more challenging to conduct class in the target language. It is also unclear to what degree the findings apply to university-level instructors, although research in the latter area has been conducted by authors such as Edstrom (2006).

One topic for future research is the potential impact of implementing an enhanced focus on target language use in methods classes for prospective teachers, as has been recommended here. Although new teachers' attitudes and beliefs are influenced by a variety of factors, including institutional policies and personal experience (Macaro, 2001), teacher preparation courses can play an important role in the formation of prospective teachers' belief systems (Bateman, 2004). It would be interesting to know, for example, to what extent the unusually high degree of target language use by the student teachers in Macaro's 2001 study could be attributed to the intensive focus that their coursework placed on the issue. If prospective teachers understand the role that the target language can play in their classes and are skilled in using it, they will be better equipped to make their classroom an input-rich environment that is conducive to language and culture learning.

Notes

1. All names have been changed.
2. It was anticipated that it would be easier for participants to respond to this question if a particular class level were specified. Spanish 2 was chosen since it represented a level that nearly all the student teachers would be teaching.
3. Due to the small sample size ($N = 10$), the alpha level for the study was set at $p < .10$. In spite of the small sample, it was felt that these tests might be useful in calling attention to items on which students' responses might have changed during the semester, and the results should be interpreted accordingly.

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