Learner Expectations and the Promotion of Language Acquisition in the FL Classroom

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In the last chapter of *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* (1982) Krashen analyzes seven different instructional methods in terms of their ability to fulfill the requirements for what he has called Optimal Input. The methods are: grammar-translation, audio-lingual, cognitive code, the direct method, the natural approach, TPR and Suggestopedia. He then goes on to examine alternatives to classroom methods, namely conversation, pleasure reading, and subject matter teaching. He concludes that all three alternatives are potentially superior to the seven FL instructional methods reviewed, in that they can provide more Optimal Input and thus better facilitate language acquisition.

In the last section of this chapter, appropriately entitled "Some Problems," Krashen briefly touches on possible obstacles to the acceptance of an approach to language instruction that focuses primarily or exclusively on acquisition. Since grammar-based instruction of one form or another has been the norm in recent years, we should not be surprised to find students in our acquisition-based classroom who, as Krashen notes, "will only accept conscious grammar and drill as the core of a language class, and who expect all of their errors to be corrected" (1982:187).

Thus the set of expectancies which accompany learners into the classroom may cause them to reject acquisition as inappropriate to the task at hand, at least as they themselves define it. To resolve this discrepancy, Krashen suggests both long term and short term solutions. The long term solution is simply to wait until the next generation of students has been re-educated as to the actual nature of second language acquisition. Krashen admits that this long term solution offers little hope to those who are currently attempting to implement acquisition-based language programs. As for short term solutions, two very different suggestions are put forth. One is to present a short course on language acquisition, either prior to or as part of the language teaching program. Krashen makes the point, which I believe is well taken, that this type of intervention would be justified if we conceive of the language requirement in high schools and colleges as including skills and information about how to acquire any language, not just the one

The other short-term strategy for gaining acceptance of acquisition-based instruction is much less straightforward:

Another approach, and one that I am personally not above using in my classes, is deception. We can teach vocabulary or grammar, and as long as it is done in the target language, a great deal of acquisition will take place, the medium being the message. We can teach situationaly, giving students useful, short dialogues that satisfy the craving for learning and memorized language, but at the same time, present comprehensible input (Krashen 1982:187-88).

I do have a strong personal bias against the use of deception in education, and especially in higher education. In fact, I draw a distinction between foreign language training, which I define as instruction directed towards developing proficiency alone, and foreign language education, which, in addition to promoting proficiency, aims at developing learner control of the language learning process by giving learners a basic understanding of the principles of second language acquisition (Sternfeld 1985). Deception obviously does not contribute to fulfilling these broader goals.

Given my bias toward foreign language education, the idea of a short course on second language acquisition is quite appealing. I do, however, have serious misgivings about trying to educate or, better yet, re-educate the language learner through instruction about language acquisition. The reason is simple - the effectiveness of such intervention is highly questionable. In fact, research in social psychology warns us that such intervention could even be counterproductive.

To understand the potential dangers of such an approach, we need to look briefly at reactance theory and its relationship to attitude change. Reactance theory focuses on the individual who perceives that his free behaviors are being infringed upon. A free behavior is defined as an act that the individual feels he can engage in at either the particular moment or at some time in the future, and that he knows he has the necessary physical or psychological ability to perform (Worchel and Cooper 1983:157).

According to Brehm (1966), when a free behavior has been eliminated or is threatened with elimination, an individual is psychologically aroused. This arousal, aimed at restoring or safeguarding this freedom, is what is known as psychological reactance. When, for example, an individual perceives that there is an attempt to influence his thinking, he will
see this as a threat to a free behavior. Notes Brehm:

Whatever factors promote the perception that the communicator is attempting to influence may also arouse reactance and a consequent tendency to disagree with the advocated position (1966:104).

Thus, a course which has the stated purpose of re-educating learners about language acquisition is likely to be perceived by learners as an attempt to influence them and limit their free behavior. This can lead to reactance, whereby learners reject out of hand the new information in an effort to protect their behavioral freedom. I would like to illustrate this phenomenon with a few examples, two taken from the literature on reactance and one from my personal experience.

In two studies carried out by Walster and Festinger (1962), students were set up so that either they perceived themselves as "overhearing" a discussion concerning smoking or they heard it with the understanding that the discussants knew they were listening in. Not surprisingly, significantly more students who overheard the discussion changed their opinions regarding smoking than students who believed that the discussants were aware of their presence. It seems that those who overheard the discussion could not interpret the discussants' intent as persuasive in nature, while those who thought the discussants knew they were listening in were more inclined to believe that there was an attempt to sway their opinions. Hence, the latter group experienced a higher level of reactance.

In a similar study carried out by Salomon (1981), pupils were shown a videotape of a woman advocating vegetarianism.

One group heard the tape under the pretext that "one can learn how people convince themselves about something they are unsure of"; a second group heard the tape under the pretext that "there's something to be learned about vegetarianism"; the third group listened to the tape under the pretext that "we want you to consider the merits of becoming vegetarians" (1981:45).

It was the third group, the group that saw itself as being subjected to a sort of vegetarian propaganda, which showed the greatest negative change in attitude toward vegetarianism. Concludes Salomon:

The results suggest that when an event is perceived as communication, particularly when perceived as intended to change...it is [often] counter-effective (1981:45-46).

The final example of reactance comes from a course I am currently teaching at the University of Utah for ESL (Eng-
lish as a Second Language) as well as Foreign Language Teaching Assistants. The course looks at the implications of current second language acquisition research for language instruction and points out the disparity between popularly held beliefs about how people learn languages and what the research shows. Since the beliefs that I am criticizing are often among the most cherished by the TAs, many students clearly see me as trying to influence their thinking. Thus, it is not surprising to find otherwise intelligent adults feeling perfectly justified in rejecting empirical evidence strictly on the grounds that it does not fit in with what they believe is true. This anti-intellectualism is a typical form of reactance of adults, including those at the university who like to believe their behavior to be rationally based.

These three examples suggest that a course on second language acquisition designed to re-educate learners might run into several problems along the way. And while language learners might be less attached to their beliefs than language teachers, there is still the risk that in trying to prepare students in advance for acquisition-based instruction a significant number of them may come to resist it even more!

I have therefore set about developing an alternative to instruction about second language acquisition. This alternative uses the learners' own experience in acquiring the target language in the classroom as a catalyst for altering their schemas concerning the nature of language learning. In other words, I have designed acquisition-based instruction in such a way that learners must confront the lack of congruence between their current set of expectations as to how language is learned and how they must define the task at hand if they are to survive in this particular class. Before I describe what this course looks like, I need to go into some detail concerning the two conflicting schemas or sets of expectations we are dealing with, namely that of the student who looks upon conscious learning as the means which by language skills are developed and that of the student who sees acquisition as the underlying process.

First of all, most learners do not consciously make a distinction between learning and acquisition. Of course, many do realize that they have "picked up" certain skills in their lifetime. This type of learning has been the object of study of many learning theorists under a variety of names, including observational learning (Bandura 1977), incidental learning (Postman et al 1956), discovery learning (Bruner 1959), informal learning (Brown 1977), and, in the case of language learning, acquisition (Krashen 1982). Irrespective of its label, learners do not usually see this type of learning as a viable alternative to the intentional learning traditionally associated with the classroom.
At the same time, many learners will contend that for developing communicative competence, there is probably nothing better than "picking up" the language by living in the country where the language is spoken. While they will acknowledge the superiority of this type of informal learning — which Krashen calls acquisition — in at least this one context, many of these same learners will deny that the communicative competence acquired in this fashion actually constitutes "knowing" a language. This double standard may account for the following statement which I overheard made by a bilingual Spanish/English speaker:

My mother is Mexican, so I grew up hearing Spanish. So I know it, but I don't really know it. I guess I have to learn it the right way.

Indeed, a large segment of the student population assumes that FL instruction, by definition, focuses on the phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules of the target language. Learners may even feel that they are not actually learning the language unless, in addition to having functional use, they can articulate something about linguistic structure. Furthermore, if they can succeed in a class without developing such conscious linguistic representations, they may feel that they are somehow cheating themselves by skipping crucial steps in the learning process. This can lead to fears that at some future date they will pay dearly for their failure to have learned a foreign language "properly."

To understand the instructional problems that develop out of this learning/acquisition schematic mismatch, we need to look more closely at the specific assumptions that underlie the two schemas. A learning schema views the language learning process as relatively fast, discrete and quantifiable. In the course of an exercise, a lesson, or a chapter, etc. learners expect to focus their attention on and master a well-defined and circumscribed unit of instruction (e.g. a list of vocabulary words, morphological or syntactic rules). An acquisition schema sees language skills as emerging in quite a different fashion. Neither fast, nor discrete, nor readily quantifiable, the acquisition process is seen as slow, continuous, and almost imperceptible. As Krashen notes:

...when we have acquired something, we are hardly aware of it. In a sense, it seems as if it was always there, and something anyone can do (1982:187).

Thus, rather than inviting quantification of results, as is the case with learning, an acquisition schema sees outcomes as requiring a more qualitative approach to evaluation, along the lines of the following statements:
Now I can read the articles in the newspaper fairly easily as long as I am up on current events.

I'm comfortable in conversations where I can control the topic.

There is also a significant difference in the way learning and acquisition schemas characterize the relationship between naturalistic speech and input, i.e., between language that would be addressed to a native speaker with status equivalent to that of the learner and the input the learner actually receives in the classroom. A learning schema sets up the expectation that input in the initial stages of instruction will represent only a small subset of naturalistic speech with respect to phonology, syntax, lexicon, discourse and topic (Figure 1a). This can be summarized as follows:

a) Initial input will be characterized by massive simplification, and

b) only gradually will it take on the features of naturalistic speech.

An acquisition schema (Figure 1b), in contrast, assumes that input, even at the initial stages, will not deviate radically from naturalistic speech. While some purely linguistic modifications, such as word choice, are expected, and there are admittedly greater constraints on viable topics, most modifications are assumed to be of an interactional nature. Thus, we can summarize the expectations based on an acquisition schema as follows:

Figure 1. Naturalistic Speech vs. Input

a. Learning schema  b. Acquisition schema
a) Input will deviate only slightly from naturalistic language, and

b) comprehension of this input will require extensive negotiation of meaning.

These initial differences with regard to classroom input vs. naturalistic speech are further magnified by the relationship that develops over time between input, intake and output. Intake is that subset of the input which the learner can successfully process. Output is that portion of the intake which the learner can produce. In Figure 2 we see a set of idealized learning curves in which the lines representing input, intake and output are parallel and minimally separated. This relationship can be roughly paraphrased as "today's input becomes tomorrow's intake and the following day's output."

**Figure 2. Idealized Learning Curves**

With acquisition a very different relationship obtains (Fig. 3). The acquisition curves presented here assume that the input is only roughly-tuned to the learner's current level of comprehension and that production is not forced and emerges only gradually. Since increased comprehension allows for input that more closely approximates native-like speech, intake does not usually equal input. Of course, the percentage of input that becomes intake will gradually increase since input and intake tend to develop in parallel fashion.
The predicted relationship between intake and output is also quite different under the two schemas. Initially there may be no production at all so that the gap between what the learner understands and what he can produce actually widens as comprehension goes up. Furthermore, when production does emerge, the gap between comprehension and production may continue to widen before it narrows.

A final distinction between learning and acquisition schemas concerns the role of production, i.e. output. In a learning schema, production is crucial because it is seen as providing rehearsal opportunities essential to retention and because it is considered the best means of monitoring progress. In contrast, an acquisition schema does not see production as playing a central role. Since production is viewed as a by-product of comprehension, it is assumed that production will always lag behind. Of equal importance is the fact that when production does emerge, it is characterized by the transitional forms of the learner's evolving interlanguage. The use of such transitional forms means that the learner's output will deviate significantly from the input, making production an even less appropriate measure of receptive skills.

Summing up, we can say that the learner who approaches instruction with a learning schema will have the following expectations:
1. Learning is fast, discrete and quantifiable.

2. Initial input will be a small subset of naturalistic speech and will be characterized by extensive linguistic simplification.

3. If instruction is well designed and carefully implemented and if the learner has sufficient aptitude and motivation, then

   \[ \text{input} = \text{intake} = \text{output}. \]

4. Production is crucial because a) it provides rehearsal opportunities essential for retention and b) it is a reliable means of evaluating progress.

On the other hand, an acquisition schema sets up the following expectations:

1. Acquisition is slow, continuous and often imperceptible.

2. Initial input will reflect naturalistic speech and comprehension of this input will require extensive negotiation of meaning.

3. Comprehension is central to acquisition and is the best indicator of progress.

4. Even under optimal conditions, production will lag behind comprehension, and the gap between the two may widen before it begins to narrow.

The problem here is not simply the fact that learning and acquisition schemas are different, but that they are also quite often in conflict with one another. Thus, an important question is what effect the invocation of a learning schema has on both the learners' motivation and their ability to process input in an acquisition-based classroom.

First, any attempt on the learners' part to consciously assimilate the target language via naturalistic speech, i.e., to use naturalistic speech for learning, will be frustrated by the very nature of the input. The grading and sequential presentation of input in a language learning context is intended to facilitate conscious problem solving. Naturalistic input, on the other hand, is only roughly-tuned to the learners' current level of comprehension; furthermore, the aim of such tuning is to facilitate not learning, but communication. Although such input may in fact be close to optimal for acquisition, the lack of grading and sequencing, along with the increased communicative demands made upon the learner, may thwart their efforts to consciously
induce the rules of the target language. Learning becomes arduous, results are meager compared to those obtainable with simplified input, and motivation declines.

Furthermore, the receptive proficiency which is acquired in spite of this task-inappropriate processing (a testimonial to the robustness of acquisition) is often ignored or under-valued by learners. They are frustrated by their inability to specify, and therefore quantify, their linguistic knowledge, and only reluctantly will they resort to statements that merely qualify their current competence. As far as their production skills are concerned, they are often more embarrassed than gratified by the ill-formed utterances of their interlanguage. Thus, the demotivating effects of inefficient learning are compounded by both the lack of quantifiable results and the emergence of ill-formed utterances that typify the learners' interlanguage.

However, the major source of learner demotivation lies in the fact that perfectly normal and expected acquisition curves look very much like unsuccessful learning curves. Whereas Fig. 2 depicts idealized learning curves, average learners soon discover that their progress more closely resembles the dispiriting learning curves shown below in Fig. 4. Here input continues to move closer to naturalistic speech, as dictated by curriculum and syllabus, while intake, i.e., what the learner understands, starts to drop.

**Figure 4. Typical Learning Curves**

![Typical Learning Curves Graph](image)
off. Furthermore, the learners’ own production, or output, soon lags even further behind their already faltering comprehension.

Learners in an acquisition-based classroom who are unaware that their language learning experience reflects the slowly converging lines of language acquisition (cf. Fig. 3) will, using a learning schema, characterize their progress as mirroring the slowly diverging lines of unsuccessful learning (cf. Fig. 4). Thus, they will erroneously interpret their perfectly normal and steady linguistic development as a sign of progressive failure. Now, if the learners have indeed been applying themselves assiduously to the task at hand, they may conclude, again erroneously, that instruction is poorly designed, that their teacher is ineffective and/or that they themselves are poor language learners. Needless to say, such beliefs can have a devastating effect on the learners’ motivation.

The consequences of applying a learning schema to the cognitive processing of naturalistic input are equally serious. Learners rely primarily on their restricted grammatical competence which is woefully inadequate for processing ungraded and unsequenced input. Moreover, by appealing first to grammatical schemas, learners often ignore or even block out processing schemas based on their understanding of context and their knowledge of the world. As a result, not only do they unnecessarily overload their processing capacity, but they actually deny themselves access to the rich contextual support that would reduce cognitive demands and thereby allow them to understand the input in spite of their restricted linguistic system.

Thus, learners who enter the language classroom with a learning schema will find acquisition-based instruction not only disorienting and frustrating, but of dubious efficacy. Their schema will have a detrimental effect on motivation and on their ability to comprehend naturalistic input. This can lead to further delays in the already slow process of acquisition, locking learners into a vicious circle in which they themselves become proof of the failure of instruction. Avoiding learner entrapment in this downward spiral is indeed crucial if we are to ensure the success of acquisition in the classroom.

Having reviewed the differences between learning and acquisition schemas, I would now like to turn to a description of my approach to re-educating unprepared learners, that is, those who come into the acquisition-based classroom with a marked learning bias. This re-education is carried out in two steps. First, the learners are literally forced to employ behaviors appropriate to acquisition. This creates a conflict between their previous learning schemas and the acquisition schema which actually underlies their current
behavior. This schematic mismatch, which creates what social psychologists refer to as cognitive dissonance, results in a state of tension and a concomitant drive to reduce that tension. Ideally, when equilibrium is re-established, it will be the acquisition schema which is dominant.

How are learners induced into experiencing cognitive dissonance? Essentially, conditions are created in the classroom which make it extremely difficult, if not outright impossible, for learners to engage in conscious learning, that is, to focus on linguistic form. The learners’ attention is constantly being directed towards the informational content of all communication in the target language. To this end I employ three basic techniques which reflect Krashen’s three alternatives to FL instructional methods: extensive reading, conversation, and subject matter teaching.

Students in my first year Spanish class are now in the sixth week of their second quarter. Since the second week of the first quarter they have been regularly receiving La Opinion, a Spanish-language daily newspaper from Los Angeles. The first quarter they received four issues each week; this quarter, at their own request, they receive five issues weekly. Each day they are assigned a minimum of four articles to read at home. Daily quizzes on the newspaper require that students be able to assign a plausible meaning in English to one or two paragraphs chosen at random from the four articles. The sheer amount of reading as well as the emphasis on plausibility rather than accuracy avoids reliance on what Newmark (1971) calls "cryptoanalytic decoding," and encourages instead extensive and, in the early stages, primarily superficial reading.

As for conversation, I speak with one student at a time at the front of the class for 3-5 minutes. The student and I both use extensive non-verbal signals and, in the early stages, rely heavily on the blackboard to generate visual cues. The rest of the class is usually involved in taking notes on the content of the conversation, at the early stages in English, at later stages in Spanish. There is little emphasis on learner production. I tell students to focus on helping me to make myself understood and on using me to help them make themselves understood. Finally, I remind them that the main purpose of these conversations is to elicit optimal input from the instructor for the benefit of all the other students who are listening.

With regard to subject matter teaching, the "backwash" effect (Jones 1979) suggests that students who are tested on content rather than language will inevitably focus primary attention on assimilating the information they are receiving rather than on the linguistic structures by means of which that information is encoded. Since La Opinion provides extensive coverage of Latin America, I have chosen to concen-
trate on the history and geography of that region. For example, for the past two weeks students have had daily lectures on the history of Nicaragua, with particular emphasis on the how previous US intervention in the internal affairs of Nicaragua has shaped current relations between the two countries.

These three activities comprise the behavioral component of learner re-education, and, as previously noted, are intended to force learners into a state of cognitive dissonance. The next step is to promote a dissolution of this tension which favors the acquisition schema. This may involve all three types of behavior associated with reducing cognitive dissonance: 1) changing the previously held schema to bring it in line with an acquisition schema, 2) using current experiences to support development of the acquisition schema, and 3) reassessing the importance of the two schemas, so that the learning schema, while remaining intact, is seen as considerably less important than the acquisition schema. This tension-reducing component is centered around the students’ weekly English-language journal which serves as a catalyst for student reflection on the vicissitudes of their language learning experience. Once each week a portion of one class period is given over to a discussion in English of several of the recurring issues found in the students’ diaries.

Fifteen weeks into this year-long course is still too soon to make any definitive statements as to the success rate of this attempt at retraining students to acquire rather than learn in the language classroom. To be sure, there have already been some obvious successes, often students who were predisposed to acquisition because of previous failure in language study through learning-based methods. A few, two so far out of some forty students, chose to go back to a traditional, learning-based course. Evidence from student diaries indicates that the others are somewhere on the road to becoming what I call enfranchised learners (Sternfeld 1985): those who are ready, willing, and able to assume control of the language acquisition process.

The entire series of diary entries for one such student is included in the appendix. This student had never studied any foreign language before enrolling in first quarter Spanish. Although each student’s experience has been unique, the reflections of this student do touch on many of the problems shared by other class members. Moreover, this longitudinal view of a single student’s attempt to revise her schemas illustrates better than any cross-sectional sample the developmental nature of the process involved.
APPENDIX

FIRST QUARTER

DAY 1: Foreign language - the thought causes me to freeze. Any language which is not spoken in English frightens me because it is exactly as the name states - "foreign." I have never taken a linguistics class because I am afraid of the challenge. When I registered for Spanish 101 I had some reservations, yet I knew that this would eventually become a useful tool in my life. Upon walking in the classroom I expected the security of English and textbooks - I was wrong on both accounts. It was intriguing to be in a class where the only words spoken were in Spanish. I soon became frightened, however, thinking I was in the wrong class. Fright soon turned to frustration as I began to feel like a foreigner because I was unable to understand the discussion taking place within the classroom. When informed that no text would be used, I felt totally defenseless and confused. After thinking about the classroom policy for this Spanish class, I am very excited to learn the language. At first, I was unable to understand how I could learn the language by simply listening. I see now that this is the method used, when we are usually children, to learn English.

DAY 2: The second day of Spanish was slightly different than the first. I still felt overwhelmed and frustrated, yet I began to listen very carefully to the classroom conversation. It was exhausting trying to follow the discussion, but I learned something in the process. I was also comforted to know that there are students in the class with no previous foreign language experience. I suppose I am not the only person totally confused.

DAY 3: I am beginning to feel slightly more secure in the class. The realization that other students feel just as lost as myself gave me new confidence. The one to one discussions between students and the teacher were very interesting and fun. As a basic survival measure, I have started to listen more attentively to the discussions in class, and I am enthusiastic about learning Spanish. During the learning process, however, I must teach myself to be very patient.

DAY 4: I am finding it much easier to comprehend the articles in La Opinión. This understanding, however, is probably a result of knowing what is occurring in the world by reading an English newspaper, and watching the news. I have a roommate who is very fluent in Spanish, and she chuckles when I say "no entiendo" to everything she says. I still feel competitive towards the other students in the class, and I'm fearful that they are catching on much faster than I. It is difficult for me to put my fears and apprehensions behind, but perhaps in a couple of weeks this will become easier to do.

WEEK 2: FRUSTRATION - that sums the week up in one word. Last week I felt confident that I would learn the language in time, but now I'm very unsure of myself and my ability to learn Spanish. I feel that everyone is catching on so quickly, and I'm depressing myself in an attempt to catch up. I rarely understand what is being said in class, and the daily newspaper quizzes frighten me. I can usually understand what the article is about, but when it comes to interpreting a single paragraph, I have a difficult time. I enjoyed the presentation given by Professor Malloy, and was particularly impressed with his story about the boy and his tomatoes. I totally agree with his statement about being right - when you have to be right you stop figuring things out. Maybe this is my problem. Am I behind or do I just have a defeatist attitude? I feel like an asinine fool when everyone laughs at something being said - I never know what they're laughing at. The students seem to understand everything that is being said. The students who do the conversations in front of the class are very intimidating. They are always so relaxed, and seem to be comprehending what the professor is saying to them. Many of them seem to have picked up a great deal of Spanish already. I hope this is a result of previous experience in Spanish classes. If not, I am lagging far behind and the situation is hopeless.

WEEK 3: Although I still feel very alienated, so to speak, I think I am beginning to feel slightly more comfortable around the students in the class. At times, however, I become discouraged and give up. When the instructor begins speaking fluently to another student, I become frustrated and often cease to
listen to the conversation. I have noticed that most of the students already fluent in Spanish have previously taken classes in Espanol or they have learned the language though relatives or knowledge of other languages. This realization is comforting. When I did my three minute conversation with the professor, I was very apprehensive at first. When I stopped worrying about what others were thinking and began concentrating on what the professor was saying, however, I found the activity rather enjoyable and almost bearable. I have found that I comprehend more of the Spanish than I realized, yet I am afraid to use the Spanish I know for fear that I will use the wrong pronunciation. I have friends who speak Spanish fluently, and they cringe whenever people pronounce words incorrectly. I feel that the attitude of the students in the classroom has really helped me. As I have talked with some of the students I have made new acquaintances which is often difficult to do at a large university.

WEEK 4: This class is becoming increasingly difficult, as I suppose any class should. As I look back at my first expectations of the Spanish class, I am reminded that this class is not at all like I anticipated in the beginning. I expected Spanish to follow the traditional classroom guidelines, but from day one I knew my expectations were way off. I enrolled in Spanish because, quite frankly, I need it to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree. When I discovered that 25 hours of foreign language was a requirement, I moaned at first. Because foreign language has always frightened me, I have never taken a class in this discipline. I finally decided that I would have to live with the requirement, and I even convinced myself that the experience could be fun. Of all the languages I could have taken I decided to enroll in Spanish because I felt that it would be the most useful language. Upon conclusion of my 4th week of Spanish, I feel that I have gained an interest in and appreciation for the language. I don't have an understanding for Espanol, [not] yet anyway, but hopefully that will come in time. I have found myself becoming very distracted in class this week. It is often difficult for me to concentrate on the classroom discussion and as a result I often find myself talking or doing other things. I believe this distraction stems from feelings of defeat and frustration. Although I am still frustrated, however, I am beginning to enjoy the classroom atmosphere much more than I did at first. These feelings of comfort are helping me to deal with the competitive aspects of the class, and as a result I am beginning to concentrate more on the language rather than the competition in the class.

WEEK 5: This week ended in frustration for me as the previous weeks have, I feel that I am not learning as much as I should. It seems that almost everybody else in the class is learning at a fast rate while I am not. My progress and mastery over the Spanish language seems to be progressing very slowly. I have had an easier time in reading the newspapers though. At the first of the quarter I had to spend two to three times longer than I do now in order to grasp an adequate comprehension of the article. This progress pleases me because I am feeling more encouraged as I get better at least at this aspect of my introduction to Spanish. With each class I am also able to better understand what is being said. However, I still feel as though I am learning too slowly. Though I know much more now than at the beginning of the quarter, I am nowhere near the level of comprehension of Spanish that I had hoped to be at by this time. For this reason, I am becoming discouraged with myself. I hope that I gain back some of my initial interest so that I will be successful in learning Spanish. I think that part of the reason that I am so displeased is that I am expecting too much of myself and of the class. I realize that I have to be patient and to remain confident in order to be successful. but it is hard to do when I seem to be failing to reach my goals and aspirations. I guess I will just have to keep trying.

WEEK 6: I am feeling much better about this class now. After reading your letter I realized I was expecting too much of myself and of the class. I now understand that patience is the key to being successful in this endeavor. I am beginning to see that I am understanding more than I thought I would be from a week ago. Again, this week I am able to comprehend the Spanish newspaper much better and faster than I was able to previously. It seems that as time goes by I need less and less time to adequately read the paper. Class discussions are becoming slightly more difficult to understand. I believe this is true because we are being introduced to a wider variety of material as we progress in our learning of Spanish. I am also realizing that I should not be ashamed of my lack of knowledge of Spanish when I compare myself to others in the class. It took me a long time to become aware of the
fact that people are mainly concerned with their own progress and not mine. I am also feeling more comfortable in the classroom situation because I am beginning to make new friends in class. I feel this will help me to be more vocal and consequently progress faster. My only complaint is that the lectures seem to be very repetitive, which leads me to becoming bored.

WEEK 7: I feel very good about my progress in Spanish this week. Again I am feeling more confident than I was the previous week. I feel that if I continue to progress down this positive path then I will be successful in my learning of the Spanish language. Once again, reading the newspaper is becoming easier as I am able to recognize more and more words each time. The first thing I do in reading an article is to read it over and pick out the words which I am familiar with. Then I try to infer the general meaning of the article from these known words. Then, to gain a more complete understanding, I will sometimes skim over the article two or three more times. I am afraid and rather reluctant to do the conversation in front of the class. I feel this way because I don’t know enough Spanish to converse fully, and, as a result, will have to rely on English to express myself. I am also unsure that I will even be able to understand what the instructor says. I feel I am becoming more a part of the class and as a result I’m concentrating more on the lectures as I feel more comfortable. I also believe that I am asking more questions because I am beginning to feel this way. Through my questions I am of course gaining a deeper understanding of Spanish.

WEEK 8: For the first time this year I can honestly say that I am looking forward to the next quarter of Spanish. My interest in this language is large enough now to make me excited to learn more. Spanish is my favorite course this quarter. I believe this is true because I feel most relaxed and interested in Spanish. I feel I will continue to enjoy Spanish because I constantly am more relaxed with the passing of each class period. One thing that makes me very happy is the fact that there will be no final exam in this class. I do not feel confident enough of my Spanish skills to do well on a final exam. I hope that they will increase enough so that I will be able to pass the final at the end of the third quarter. I am feeling less apprehensive about the conversations as well. In fact, I am even beginning to look forward to them. Reading the newspaper is becoming easier and easier as usual. However, there still are many words which I still do not understand at all. I am usually able to derive the general meaning of the article from the known words despite this fact.

WEEK 10: It’s hard to believe this 1st quarter is at an end. It seems only days ago when I first entered this class, believing I was in the wrong section. I am encouraged as this quarter comes to a close. Encouraged because I can honestly say I’ve made progress. Who would have believed that I would have ever learned to say “no entiendo,” let alone all the other Spanish words I can now say? I never thought I would be capable of enjoying this class, but I do. There are so many friendly people in the class. I don’t know everyone, but the people I do know are great. It makes me happy when I see one of them on campus and we say “hi” to one another. I really feel that I have made some good friends at the University of Utah. I am so excited to see how I will progress after two more quarters in Spanish. I think I have finally become more realistic about progress, and less concerned about defeat. I know each day in Spanish will present new progress and new problems at the same time, yet I now realize this is what progress is about.

First Quarter Final Diary (written over Christmas vacation): As I attended class during the final week of fall quarter, I was astonished at the progress we, as a class, had made. I could remember when several members of the class, including myself, had no idea what “Cómo estás” meant, and during the last week we were discussing people’s vacation plans -- now that’s progress! During the last week of class I could see that I had made progress in many areas of the curriculum. I felt more at ease during the teacher/student conversations and actually found myself enjoying the conversation. I could also see the progress which most of my peers had made, and I was impressed. After witnessing the progress of both myself and my classmates, I knew that we had progressed as a class, while progressing individually at the same time. I found the translation of the “Bebe Noises” article and the translation of “Los Puertorriqueños” to be fairly difficult, but I was encouraged with my translations of these literary pieces. The vocabulary test, conversation with Professor Gonzales and the questions on Honduras and El
Salvador were easier than I had expected. I was especially surprised while doing the vocabulary test that I knew as many words as I did, yet that still wasn't a lot nor did I expect it to be. Nonetheless, I was encouraged and excited to go on. The translation of "Bebé Noises" and "Los Puertorriqueños", as well as the conversation with Professor Gonzales were language activities which required skills I gained through direct practice. Taking notes in Spanish, the vocabulary test, and the questions on Honduras and El Salvador required skills which emerged indirectly from the practice of other skills. It's amazing how it all ties in together, giving accent to each skill. Right now, I see my language skills increasing even more during the second quarter. I know that I mustn't place unobtainable expectations upon myself, yet I do know new skills will emerge from the ones I already have, and the old skills will improve in the meantime. During the Christmas-time, I was able to use my conversation skills with a priest visiting from Colombia. The priest was unable to speak any English whatsoever, and I was able to carry on a conversation with him in Spanish. This was an exciting, hands-on experience.

SECOND QUARTER

WEEK 1: Coming back to class after vacation and hearing Spanish once again was quite shocking. I didn't realize that lack of exposure could hinder my progress so drastically. After being away for a while, I feel that I have become a better listener. Before, I would become frustrated and stop listening. Now, however, frustration has become commonplace and I am beginning to listen to the Spanish more intensely. The assigned exercises which I did over vacation allowed me to keep most of the Spanish fresh in my mind. At first I felt burdened having to do the exercises during vacation. After I completed the exercises, however, I was glad they were assigned so that I didn't forget all of the Spanish I had learned. As I go back to the first week of last quarter, I can see drastic differences compared to the first week of this quarter. Last quarter was totally shocking and frustrating compared to this quarter. I admit that I am already frustrated as this quarter has opened, yet I basically know what to expect, and I feel that I have developed skills which will speed up my learning this quarter. I admit that I have many apprehensions concerning this quarter. I am especially concerned about the quizes and conversation. I know that I am an average student in the class, and some people have previous Spanish experience which, if things are graded on a curve, will give them a definite advantage. This is the main discouragement which I am facing right now in regard to this class.

WEEK 2: This week was generally positive for me. I can feel progress beginning to take shape, and I feel my understanding and comprehension beginning to grow. I think that using the dictionary has helped my comprehension a great deal, and I feel myself recognizing many more words than before. Although I feel that the newspaper articles are getting easier to understand, the geography and history lessons, as well as the conversations, are becoming increasingly difficult to follow. It seems that everyone who has participated in the conversations is from a native speaking country. I just sit in awe as I listen to them flawlessly converse in Spanish. I often feel envious because I feel as if they are so far ahead of me. I feel that having several conversations one day a week would be preferable to conducting conversations throughout the entire week. I think that taking notes on one conversation would be ample. The geography and history lessons are very helpful, though often difficult. I'm not exactly sure as to why we are learning history and geography, but I feel it is a nice change of pace. As to my room preference, I prefer holding class in Life Science III. I like the tiered rows and the central location of the classroom. In general, I feel that my Spanish skills are gradually increasing, and this week has made me excited to continue on with the rest of the quarter.

WEEK 3: I think this week went pretty well. I feel that my comprehension is beginning to grow, and I actually look forward to going to class. I admit that I have been putting forth more effort as far as my reading and personal study goes, and I am already beginning to see results. At times I get really frustrated while reading the newspaper, however. Sometimes I think I know what the article is about and I recognize a lot of the words, but some of the small words and verbs mess me up, and I really have a hard time explaining the article. I often look up these small words, usually verbs, and there are so many multiple meanings that I don't know which one to use. I have become really excited as I progress in my Spanish skills. I know this is too good to be true, however, and I can see another mountain
approaching me, about ready to engulf my confidence. At the end of this quarter I will be taking a trip to Southern and Northern California and Tijuana. I am excited to go and listen to some of the people speak (in Español) to see if I can recognize what they are saying. Maybe I’ll feel like I’m in class at the university!

WEEK 4: I am beginning to feel like I am accomplishing something, but at the same time I feel as if I’m far behind. Often, when we are reading the newspaper, I find that I don’t know some of the basic words, and it seems as if everyone else does. Like I said, I can feel some progress, but I am becoming discouraged because I feel so far behind. I really want to do the conversations, but I fear everyone will think of me as an idiot, because I am just barely understanding the basics of the language. If I would have known this last quarter, it would have been great, but unfortunately I am just beginning to comprehend what many people learned during the last quarter. I have begun talking to myself in Spanish at home. Sometimes I speak all night in Spanish, and half of the time I don’t even know if I’m making sense or not. It is great, however, to be able to speak what words I do know without fearing the rejection of others. I don’t know why I am beginning to feel intimidated by people in the class again – I thought I had recovered from that last quarter. It seems that all the people that were at the same level as I am as far as comprehension have dropped out of the class, and the only ones remaining are people which previously possessed some skills before attending class. I really enjoyed the day when the man from Guatemala filled in for you. I feel that he handled the class very well and, like you, he went over questions and made sure that everyone could understand.

WEEK 5: I am really beginning to enjoy the lessons on Nicaragua. Before, I took little interest in this country, but now I am beginning to pay more attention to what is happening to Nicaragua, and when I hear the name Daniel Ortega or Managua, I can associate those names and a brief history with Nicaragua. I was somewhat relieved when you commented last week that I was not the only person in class with a constant look of puzzlement upon my face. I guess what you say is true—silence in no way indicates knowledge. I know that I am quiet in class because I am afraid that I will mispronounce a word or use the wrong phrase to ask a question. I am at the point, however, that I really am trying not to care about the quality, just the quantity of questions I ask to clarify the newspaper articles or classroom discussions. I have finally realized that I pay as much to take this class as everyone else does, and if I don’t ask questions and do what I must to learn Español, then it is no one’s loss but my own.