Assessing Oral Proficiency in The Undergraduate Curriculum: Data From Spanish

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ABSTRACT

ASSESSING ORAL PROFICIENCY IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM: DATA FROM SPANISH

Ashley Sands, MA
Department of World Languages and Cultures
Northern Illinois University, 2019
Mandy Faretta-Stutenberg, Director

Students in university second-language programs expect to reach a certain level of oral proficiency by the time they complete their language requirements. Language Testing International (LTI) conducted extensive research to establish timelines regarding the number of hours of instruction required for native English speakers to reach specific proficiency levels in various second languages. Important to note is that the learners used to establish these timelines differ from typical university students in that they are trained in the second language in very small classes in an intensive (nearly immersive) environment. Therefore, a comparison of LTI data with learners from typical university classrooms is needed to understand how these timelines can be applied to university second-language programs.

This study examined university-level language learners completing their first year of study of the target language (Spanish). In order to assess each student’s language level according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Speaking Guidelines, students completed two different measures of oral proficiency: an elicited imitation task (EIT) and a simulated oral proficiency interview (SOPI). The results indicated that native speakers of English studying a Category I language, such as Spanish, can be expected to reach a Novice-Mid level of oral proficiency. These results are an important step in establishing oral proficiency guidelines for learners at the university level.
RESUMEN

EVALUACIÓN DE LA COMPETENCIA ORAL EN EL PROGRAMA UNIVERSITARIO:
DATOS DEL ESPAÑOL

Ashley Sands, MA
Department of World Languages and Cultures
Northern Illinois University, 2019
Mandy Faretta-Stutenberg, Directora

Los estudiantes en programas universitarios de segundo idioma esperan alcanzar un cierto nivel de competencia oral para cuando completen sus requisitos de idioma. Language Testing International (LTI) realizó una extensa investigación para establecer líneas de tiempo con respecto a la cantidad de horas de instrucción requeridas para que los hablantes nativos de inglés alcancen niveles de competencia específicos en varios segundos idiomas. Sin embargo, es importante tener en cuenta que los estudiantes utilizados para establecer estos plazos difieren de los estudiantes universitarios típicos en que se capacitran en el segundo idioma en clases muy pequeñas en un entorno intensivo (casi inmersivo). Por lo tanto, se necesita una comparación de los datos de LTI con los estudiantes de las aulas universitarias típicas para comprender cómo estos plazos pueden aplicarse a los programas universitarios de segundo idioma.

Este estudio examinó a estudiantes de idiomas de nivel universitario que completaron su primer año de estudio de la lengua meta (español). Con el fin de evaluar el nivel de idioma de cada estudiante de acuerdo con el American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), los estudiantes completaron dos medidas diferentes de competencia oral: una tarea de imitación provocada (elicited imitation task; EIT) y la entrevista de competencia oral simulada
(SOPI). Los resultados indicaron que se puede esperar que los hablantes nativos de inglés que estudian un idioma de Categoría I, como el español, alcancen un nivel de principiante-medio. Estos resultados son un paso importante para establecer pautas de competencia oral para estudiantes de nivel universitario.
ASSESSING ORAL PROFICIENCY IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM: DATA FROM SPANISH

BY

ASHLEY SANDS
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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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DEPARTMENT OF WORLD LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Thesis Director:
Mandy Faretta-Stutenberg
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Without the support and guidance from Dr. Mandy Faretta-Stutenberg this study would not have been realized. Throughout all the challenges faced during the beginning stages of this study, she never once made me feel like it was better to give up and pick a new topic. Working with her has been one of the highlights of my graduate career due to the invaluable information I have learned from her, and I appreciate the countless hours spent together making this study possible.

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To my family and friends, especially my mom, Dr. Michelle Davis-Sands; my dad, Simon Sands; my sister, Sierra Sands; my grandparents, Lillie and Kinsley James; my uncle, Jerald Davis; and my fiancé, Benjamin Pho, I wouldn’t have been able to make it this far without your love, support and patience.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Fully acquiring a second language requires proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Tests to assess each of these abilities have been created; however, a primary focus is on oral proficiency in a second language (L2). The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) launched the oral proficiency interview (OPI) in 1979, with the purpose of helping set language proficiency goals for students. Still, questions about how long learners need to reach various levels of oral proficiency continue. In an effort to address these questions related to the development of L2 oral proficiency, Language Testing International (LTI, the exclusive licensee of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) was tasked with categorizing world languages based on the number of hours of study a native speaker of English generally requires to reach a specific level of oral proficiency. Thus, LTI divided these world languages into four categories. Category I languages are the "easiest" or quickest languages for native English speakers to acquire and Category IV languages are the most difficult, requiring more hours of study to reach the same level of oral proficiency. According to these data, Spanish is a Category I language for native speakers of English, requiring at least 240 hours of intensive classroom study to reach an Intermediate-Low (IL) level of oral proficiency (Liskin-Gasparro, 1984). These values are widely accepted and are used by the United States government to determine language training timelines for Foreign Service Institute employees.
Since the commencement of the ACTFL Language Proficiency Guidelines in 1986, an increasing number of post-secondary or university-level L2 programs have sought to modify their curricula to improve students' communicative skills (Lee, 2000). However, before the expectations timeline established by LTI is able to be used to inform the level of oral proficiency university classroom learners are able to acquire after a certain amount of study, it is important to note that LTI data are based on language learners who complete "full-time intensive and/or immersion, proficiency-based language training" in small groups (1-4 students) under the supervision of an instructor (Liskin-Gasparro, 1984). In contrast, a typical university classroom features a larger group of students. Not only are class sizes larger, but there are fewer instructional contact hours, and most university students are simultaneously studying other subjects. Given the apparent differences between the participants used to establish LTI standards and typical, university-level classroom learners, it is essential that the relationship between hours of instruction and oral proficiency be empirically addressed for learners in a university classroom setting.

To date, studies have addressed the question of oral proficiency development in university classrooms among students of Category I languages such as French (Magnan, 1986) and Spanish (Lee, 2000), Category II languages such as German (Tschirner & Heilenman, 1998), Category III languages such as Russian (Thompson, 1996), and Category IV languages such as Japanese (Iwasaki, 2007) using the OPI as the language assessment tool. These studies provide an important complement to LTI data, but it is also necessary that these results be extended to additional languages and to larger participant groups. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the only language assessment tool employed by these studies was an oral proficiency interview or a
simulated oral proficiency interview. This offers a limited analysis of students’ oral proficiency competencies since an oral proficiency interview only requires its users to listen to and respond to a series of questions and statements. Other testing measures exist that call for students to engage with the target language in ways that give further detail about a student’s oral proficiency ability, which allows for more fine-grained analysis.

Additionally, researchers examining university-level classroom learners have included in the participant group learners with and without prior instruction in Spanish (Lee, 2000) or have failed to report learners' prior experience with the L2 (Iwasaki, 2007; Watanabe 1998). By combining into one group learners who have different amounts of prior instruction in the target language, it becomes difficult to determine how much of a role university-level instruction plays in oral proficiency gains over the course of a specified amount of time. While these studies have examined how oral proficiency levels differ based on length of instruction at the university level, there is a paucity of research that examines the language learning experience of “true beginners,” that is, students without exposure to the target language prior to their university-level instruction (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005). Using learners who have prior experience studying the target language to determine oral proficiency timelines for university-level students does not provide an accurate understanding of how long a learner with no experience will take to achieve a certain level of oral proficiency. Learners with prior experience may evidence higher levels of oral proficiency than those with no experience, which may lead to establishing higher proficiency goals than necessary. The amount of instruction prior to beginning university-level courses could account for the wide ranges of OPI scores previous studies have reported.
In order to update and extend research findings and compare LTI language learning timelines to university-level classroom learners, it is important that the number of hours of instruction (and not merely weeks or semesters of study) be reported. For example, students of Spanish at Northern Illinois University will have received approximately 75 hours of language instruction by the end of their first year of study.

The present study contributed to and triangulates these data while providing more fine-grained information about productive and receptive language abilities through the use of two independent measures of global proficiency, one of which measures receptive language skills. Further, participants in the current study are as close to true beginners as possible, given the limitations of recruiting from university classes. These methodological considerations allow for a detailed examination of the relationships between the hours of instruction and the development of oral proficiency. Specifically, the study provides data regarding the level of oral proficiency achieved by L2 learners after one year of university-level study of Spanish (a Category I language). Data of this kind could help both language instructors and students set realistic learning objectives based on the target language.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 2 begins with a review of the extant literature and the history of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, along with studies that have used the OPI and EIT as measures of oral proficiency. Chapter 3 presents the methodology utilized, beginning with a description of the overall research design and the participants. Next, detailed descriptions of the materials and procedures used to assess proficiency levels are provided. Also included in Chapter 3 is a
description of the analyses. Chapters 4 and 5 conclude the thesis with a discussion of the results as well as their impact and significance.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As more second-language programs adopt entrance or exit requirements for their students, a need to have a standard oral proficiency level and a way to measure it after each year of instruction increases (Lee, 2000). The purpose of this study is to identify what level of oral proficiency is realistically attainable after one year of college-level instruction for students who have no prior or only limited experience studying a second language. This literature review provides a general overview first of the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines and then of studies of university-level classroom learners that have employed the ACTFL OPI or a similar task as a measure of oral proficiency. Research that makes use of an elicited imitation task (EIT) as an independent measure of oral proficiency is also discussed and compared with the OPI to address its validity as a testing measure.

ACTFL Speaking Guidelines

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines in Speaking detail the specific range of abilities that speakers have at varying levels of oral proficiency. The commencement of these guidelines was in 1986, and since then, there have been two revised editions, 1999 and 2012. Each edition provides descriptors of the range of abilities speakers at each level of oral proficiency have and the tasks these speakers are able to handle. More detailed descriptions of these abilities and tasks are given with each revised edition. In order to understand the results of studies using these
guidelines, a brief explanation of each set of guidelines needs to be stated based on the year each study was conducted.

**Speaking Guidelines from 1986**

The original ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (published in 1986) include three major levels that describe oral proficiency (Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced) with three sublevels (Low, Mid, and High) under the Novice and Intermediate levels, for a total of seven proficiency levels.

Speakers at the lowest level (Novice) are categorized as being able to communicate minimally. More specifically, those who are categorized as Novice-Low speakers do not have functional communicative ability but are able to use isolated words and a few high-frequency phrases. While Novice-Mid speakers also use isolated words and high-frequency phrases, there is an increased quantity of these words and phrases when compared to Novice-Low speakers. Novice-Mid speakers are also able to handle simple, elementary needs and express basic courtesies. Utterances typically consist of two or three words and include frequent pauses and repetition of interlocutors’ words. For Novice-High speakers, speech continues to consist of learned words and phrases. However, these speakers are able to expand on the learned utterances through simple recombination of their elements. Novice-High speakers manage to ask questions and make statements, and while there are signs of spontaneity in their speech, there is no real autonomy of expression. At this level, there is a focus on vocabulary that consists of basic objects, places, and common kinship terms. Along with vocabulary and grammatical difficulties, their pronunciation may be heavily influenced by their first language.
Along with the aforementioned abilities and tasks, Intermediate-level speakers are able to create with the language by combining and recombining learned elements. They are able to initiate, sustain, and close basic communicative tasks in a minimal way and can ask and answer questions. At the Intermediate-Low level speakers begin to be understood by interlocutors accustomed to dealing with speakers at this level. Intermediate-Low speakers can participate successfully in a limited number of situations by asking and answering questions and initiating and responding to simple statements. However, their speech is highly restricted and consists of linguistics inaccuracies. These speakers are successful at performing tasks such as introducing themselves, ordering a meal, asking directions, and making purchases. Once at the Intermediate-Mid level, speakers are able to handle uncomplicated communicative tasks. They are able to participate in simple conversations about topics such as their personal history and leisure activities. Speakers’ utterance lengths are slightly greater at the Intermediate-Mid level than at lower levels; however, frequent pauses are still evident in their speech.

Furthermore, target-language pronunciation of Intermediate-Mid speakers may continue to be influenced by their first language. Despite some non-target-like pronunciation and pauses in speech, Intermediate-Mid speakers can be understood by interlocutors who have experience with speakers at this level. Speakers at the Intermediate-High level evidence more connected discourse and are able to manage a conversation using appropriate strategies. Although the speech of Intermediate-High speakers is limited by vocabulary size, which causes hesitation and unexpected circumlocution, these speakers can be generally understood by interlocutors not accustomed to dealing with speakers at this level.
At the Advanced level, in addition to handling the tasks described at the lower levels, learners begin to play a more participatory role in conversations. Advanced-level speakers are not only able to initiate, sustain, and close communicative tasks, they are able to cover a wide variety of tasks types. For example, speakers at the Advanced level are expected to be able to handle a complication or unforeseen event, satisfy school and work requirements, and narrate using extended discourse.

Multiple published studies utilized the 1986 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines to explore second-language development among university-level students (Magnan, 1986; Thompson, 1996; Tschirner, 1992; Tschirner & Heilenman, 1998; Watanabe, 1998). Researchers who found their participants reaching the Advanced level took issue with the rating being too broad, as there were no sublevels for the Advanced level as there was with both Novice and Intermediate (e.g., Magnan, 1986; Thompson, 1996). Due to the lack of sublevels for the Advanced level, much ambiguity existed, which left unclear what specific communicative tasks learners at an Advanced level were capable of completing.

**Speaking Guidelines from 1999**

In 1999, ACTFL released an updated set of speaking guidelines not only adding the sublevels Low, Mid, and High under the Advanced descriptor but also an even higher overall proficiency level: Superior (which did not have sublevels). Additionally, more detailed performance descriptors were added to each level to better detail speakers’ abilities. In order to better explain the High sublevel and reduce redundancy, these guidelines were presented in descending order, whereas the guidelines from 1986 were presented in ascending order.
Therefore, these guidelines begin with the Superior level and end with the Novice-Low level. The abilities described at the High sublevels are more closely related to the abilities described in the level above than in the one below and are considered an indicator of not only accomplishing the tasks described in the level itself but also as a step towards carrying out the functions at the level above. For example, speakers at the Intermediate-High level are not only able to accomplish tasks at the Intermediate level but can also perform, to some degree, tasks at the Advanced level.

Novice-High speakers are able to ask formulaic questions when asked to do so and can, at times, perform functions at the Intermediate level but are unable to sustain performance at that level. Intermediate-Mid speakers are described as being able to handle topics at the Advanced level but have difficulty linking ideas and using communicative strategies such as circumlocution. As with Intermediate-Mid speakers, Intermediate-High speakers are able to handle Advanced-level tasks such as narrating in the major time frames (past, present, and future) while using connected discourse. However, unlike Advanced-level speaker, Intermediate-High-level speakers are unable to remain in the appropriate major time frame, they misuse cohesive devices, their vocabulary is not expansive, and they fail to successfully circumlocute, that is, use words or phrases the learner knows in order to explain an unknown word and get across the same or similar meaning.

At the Advanced-Low level, speakers mostly participate in informal conversations. However, they are able to handle formal conversations related to school, home, and leisure activities. Noticeable self-correcting is evident at this level, as well as the use of generic vocabulary and an irregular flow. Attempts to produce Superior-level discourse result in
significant linguistic speech deterioration. When Advanced-Mid speakers handle topics associated with the Superior level, their speech will decline, but not as significantly as Advanced-Low speakers. However, they are able to attempt to avoid the linguistic demands of the Superior level. Advanced-Mid speakers manage with ease the linguistic challenges involved in dealing with a complication or unforeseen event. At the Advanced-High level, speakers can handle all tasks at the Advanced level and are able to perform a variety of tasks at the Superior level, but cannot sustain them. These speakers are able to support their opinions and construct hypotheses, although patterns of error appear.

Superior-level speakers are able to communicate both informally and formally on a wide range of topics. When using basic grammatical structure, it is uncommon to find a pattern of error in their speech. However, sporadic errors are made when using low-frequency structures or complex high-frequency structures.

In comparison with the 1986 guidelines, under the 1999 guidelines, oral proficiency at all levels was further refined, and, at the Advanced level, the inclusion of sublevels allowed for more fine-grained analyses. Additionally, learners were able to attain a higher rating for their speaking skills (Superior).

**Speaking Guidelines from 2012**

In 2012, ACTFL released another revision to their proficiency guidelines. These new guidelines describe five major levels: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. As with the 1999 revised guidelines, this most recent edition displays the guidelines in descending order, and each level subsumes all lower levels. The major difference in this edition
is the addition of a new major level: Distinguished. Similar to the Superior level, the
Distinguished level does not contain sublevels. The new ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe
speakers at the Distinguished level as being able to adapt their speech and register in order to
adapt their language to a variety of audiences. These speakers can comment on global issues and
highly abstract concepts. Their speech is filled with hypothetical discourse that allows them to
defend a point of view different from their own.

In summary, with the 1999 revision of the guidelines, a more detailed description was
provided for the Advanced level, and additional details were added to the major- and sublevel
descriptors for each level. A Superior rating (without sublevels) was also included in the 1999
revision. The 2012 edition of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines included a Distinguished level
(without sublevels), and additional performance descriptors were added for each proficiency
level.

Previous Research: Oral Proficiency Among University-Level Learners

Researchers recognize there are intrinsic differences between university-level learners
and the specialized, highly trained Foreign Service Institute employees upon whom the LTI
guidelines are based (e.g., Liskin-Gasparro, 1984). Despite a large number of second-language
learners in the United States who study in university-level classes, there is a paucity of research
that examines the level of oral proficiency that is typically attained after one year of such
instruction (e.g., Magnan, 1986). In this section, a review and summary of research that makes
use of oral proficiency interviews to examine the development of oral proficiency in university-
level settings are provided. This work follows ACTFL proficiency guidelines in assessing oral
proficiency levels. These summaries of the extant literature explore how outcomes from this body of work compare to LTI data and inform our understanding of how LTI language guidelines can and should be adapted to match the university-level language learning experience to help researchers and practitioners establish expectations related to oral proficiency development in university classrooms. Table 1 displays a summary of the results of these studies.

**Oral Proficiency Interview**

The ACTFL OPI, like other oral proficiency tasks, is designed to assess a speaker's overall oral competency in an L2. During the ACTFL OPI, speakers are asked a series of questions that increase in complexity as a way of assessing how well the target language is spoken. Two tasks with the same goal as the ACTFL OPI are the simulated OPI (SOPI) and the Spanish Oral Proficiency Test (SOPT), both of which ask that speakers not only respond to
Table 1

Range of OPI Scores After One, Two, Three and Four Years of University-Level Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Target Language</th>
<th>1 Year</th>
<th>2 Years</th>
<th>3 Years</th>
<th>4 Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tschirner (1992) (N=549)</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>NH-IH (92 hours of instruction)</td>
<td>NM-A (92 hours of instruction)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tschirner and Heilenman (1998) (N=20)</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>NH-IM (100 hours of instruction)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watanabe (1998) (N=65)</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>NM-IM (120 hours of instruction)</td>
<td>NH-IH (180 hours of instruction)</td>
<td>IH-A (90 hours of instruction)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee (2000) (N=30)</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>NH-IH₂</td>
<td>IL-IM³</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iwasaki (2007) (N=4)</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>IL</td>
<td>IM-IH</td>
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Note. 1 Hours of instruction, as reported in the original study. 2 Study reports three semesters of study. 3 Study reports four semesters of study.
auditory prompts but also answer questions based on images (and sometimes text) that support question comprehension.

A number of studies explore learners who are native English speakers who are studying languages that fall in different language categories as defined by LTI (Category I: Lee, 2000; Magnan, 1986; Category II: Tschirner, 1992; Category III: Thompson, 1996; Category IV: Iwasaki, 2007). These studies have furthermore explored learners with different amounts of experience with the target language, ranging from as little as one year (e.g., Magnan, 1986; Tschirner, 1992) to five years (Thompson, 1996). It is important to note that some of this research is based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines in Speaking published in 1986 (Magnan, 1986; Thompson, 1992; Tschirner, 1992; Watanabe, 1998), while others make use of the 1999 Guidelines (Lee 2000). None of the published work with university-level students to date has been based on the 2012 ACTFL Guidelines.

One of the first studies to examine the level of oral proficiency attained by undergraduate students was done by Magnan (1986). The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the level of oral proficiency and level of study. Students completing one, two, three, and four years of French study were tested (10 participants per group, 40 participants in total). In order to assess their proficiency level, students completed the ACTFL OPI during the last three weeks of the year. Learner production was rated by two ACTFL-certified raters, and the range and median proficiency level attained by students at each year of study were determined. After one year of French, the range of scores was from Novice-Mid to Intermediate-Mid/High (median: Intermediate-Low/Mid). Those completing their second year had scores ranging from Intermediate-Low to Advanced (median: Intermediate-Mid). After three years of
study, the range jumped to Intermediate-Mid/High to Advanced/Advanced-High (median: Intermediate-High/Advanced). Those who were close to completing four years of study had a range of scores similar to those who were completing their third year, with scores ranging from Intermediate-Mid to Advanced-High and a median rating of Advanced. Magnan (1986) states that while students’ oral proficiency scores went up each year, the overlap between the third and fourth years is an example of the broadness of the Advanced level. Differences in aptitude, motivation, and commitment were attributed as possible reasons for the wide range of scores reported. According to the background questionnaire, students at each level of instruction spent varying amounts of time abroad in a francophone country and had varying amounts of exposure to the French language in high school. Students also reported having different motivators for studying a foreign language, which ranged from completing course requirements to studying for pleasure and travel. In addition to small numbers of participants at each level (10), a limitation of the study is that hours of instruction - a critical element in the LTI timelines - were not reported. Although the general length of study at the university level was given (one year, two years, three years, and four years), classroom contact or instruction hours were not provided.

In a study that dramatically increased the number of participants and reported hours of university-level classroom instruction, Tschirner (1992) looked at 549 undergraduate students finishing their first or second year of college-level German study. A total of 92 hours of classroom instruction were reported for students at the end of their first year of study, and by the end of the second year, students should have completed a total of 184 hours. All students took the ACTFL OPI at the end of their first, second, third, or fourth semester as their final exam. As with the Magnan (1986) study, learners evidenced a range of proficiency scores for each level.
After one semester of study, proficiency scores ranged from Novice-Mid to Intermediate-Mid, with 60% of students reaching the Intermediate level. Proficiency levels for students at the end of their second semester of study ranged from Novice-High to Intermediate-High. Almost all students were at the Intermediate level, with more than 80% reaching Intermediate-Mid or Intermediate-High. Those completing their third semester had scores ranging from Novice-High to the Advanced level. Similar to the second-semester group, 80% of students were in the Intermediate range, with only a few reaching an Advanced level. Finally, the range of scores for the fourth semester was as follows: Novice-Mid to Advanced. Interestingly, no one was at the Novice-High level of oral proficiency. Tschirner (1992) proposes that Intermediate-Mid could be a reasonable level of oral proficiency for students to attain after one year of study.

Tschirner (1992) did not require students to state their motivation for taking the language, nor was their previous exposure to the language reported. Important to note is that German is considered a Category II language by the LTI; therefore, more hours of instruction should be needed to reach the same levels of proficiency as compared to a Category I language, such as French (Magnan, 1986).

A study that assessed learners studying a Category III language was Thompson (1996), who looked at 56 students completing one to five years of college-level Russian. Learners in this study enrolled in two different summer programs, and ACTFL OPI testing occurred during the last weeks of each summer program. As with the prior two studies, learners evidenced a range of proficiency scores for each level. Both median and range scores are provided. After one year of study, proficiency scores ranged from Novice-Low/Novice-Mid to Intermediate-Low/Intermediate-Mid, with Novice-Mid as the median score. Proficiency levels for students at
the end of their second year of study ranged from Novice-Mid/Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-High/Advanced. For the second-year group, the median score was Novice-High/Intermediate-Low. After the third year of study, the proficiency scores attained by students ranged from Intermediate-Low/Intermediate-Mid to Advanced-High/Superior, with the median score being Intermediate-Mid/Intermediate-High. Students in the fourth-year group evidenced a smaller range of proficiency scores than the previous three groups (Intermediate-Mid to Advanced-High), and the median score attained was Intermediate-High/Advanced. As with the fourth-year group, those who completed the fifth year of study also had proficiency scores ranging from Intermediate-Mid to Advanced-High. The median score for this group was Advanced/Advanced-High, which is higher than the median score for the fourth-year group. In Thompson’s (1996) study, as in the Tschirner (1992) study, students were not required to state what motivated them to take the language, nor was their previous exposure to the language reported.

In another examination of a Category II language, Tschirner and Heilenman (1998) focused on 20 university students completing their second year of German. All participants took the ACTFL OPI as a final oral examination at the end of their fourth semester and were rated by an ACTFL tester trainer and an ACTFL-certified OPI tester. They found that after two years, 75% of students were in the Intermediate range, with 45% reaching Intermediate-Low and 30% reaching Intermediate-Mid. The other 25% of students attained Novice-High. Some students were reported as being "relatively unmotivated," which coincided with a primary interest in completing their language requirement, while those who reported high levels of motivation planned to become German majors or minors or the desire to visit a German-speaking country.
Importantly, previous experience with the language was not controlled; some students had taken German in high school, and 15% of students had traveled to a German-speaking country. One student also reported speaking German with German-speaking friends outside of the classroom. Furthermore, hours of classroom instruction were not reported. However, according to Tschirner and Heilenman (1998), there was no significant correlation between OPI level and length of previous instruction in the language.

Watanabe (1998) examined the oral proficiency of 65 students enrolled in second-, third-, and fourth-year Japanese (a Category IV language) courses. This study included the hours of instruction for each level. By the end of the second year, students completed 240 contact hours, 420 after year three, and 510 hours after the fourth year. OPI results show a wide range of scores at each level of instruction. However, there was a positive correlation between OPI ratings and level of instruction. For those enrolled in the second year, the median OPI score was Novice-High, with scores ranging from Novice-Mid to Intermediate-Mid. For third-year students, the median OPI score was Intermediate-Mid, with scores ranging from Novice-High to Intermediate-High. For fourth-year students, the median OPI score was Intermediate-High, with a range of scores from Intermediate-High to Advanced. Students were not required to state what motivated them to take the language, nor was their previous exposure to the language reported.

A second study of learners of a Category I language was conducted by Lee (2000). Lee assessed the oral proficiency of 30 students who had been studying Spanish for three or four semesters at the college level. The test administered in the study was the Spanish Oral Proficiency Test (SOPT), which was developed by professors at the University of New Hampshire and based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (Lee, 2000). Four of the 30 students
included in the study were either native speakers of Spanish or came from Hispanic families. SOPT scores ranged from Novice-High to Intermediate-High for the 26 second-language learners. Of these 26 learners, approximately 54% of students completing their third semester of Spanish reached an Intermediate-Mid level of oral proficiency (with scores ranging from Novice-High to Intermediate-Mid for the third-semester group), and around 77% of students completing their fourth semester reached the same level (with scores ranging from Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-Mid). The two students who had experience abroad reached an Intermediate-High level of proficiency. Students had varying levels of high school experience studying Spanish, which could account for the range of scores. Students were not required to state what motivated them to take the language. As with other studies, hours of instruction for students at the third- and fourth-year levels were not reported. However, all students were currently enrolled in the same Spanish course, which met in 50-minute class periods three times per week, plus one-hour of conversation class each week.

As part of a larger study analyzing learners' proficiency before and after study abroad, Iwasaki (2007) looked at students who had completed either one (n = 1) or two years of college-level Japanese (n = 3) prior to their study abroad experience. The participant who had completed one year of university-level study achieved an Intermediate-Low level of oral proficiency. For the three students who had completed two years of study, one achieved a score of Intermediate-Mid and two attained Intermediate-High ratings. According to the background questionnaire, each student was "eager to improve in all areas of the Japanese language." No additional information about prior exposure to the target language or hours of instruction was provided.
Studies with OPI and Second Measure of Oral Proficiency

While the OPI is a commonly used assessment of oral proficiency for L2 learners, it is not the only accepted measure of oral proficiency and has been criticized for its length, cost, and difficulty to administer (e.g., Bowden, 2016). In an effort to explore alternative measures of overall oral proficiency, some research has employed measures such as an elicited imitation task (EIT). There are various formats of EITs, but the focus of this study is on the EIT that measures global oral proficiency by assessing a learner’s ability to repeat a series of sentences in the target language presented auditorially. In this section, I provide a review of research that has made use of both a SOPI and an EIT in assessing oral proficiency among university-level learners.

Spada, Shiu, and Tomita (2015) compared multiple validation studies of an EIT (Bowles, 2011; Ellis, 2005; Erlam, 2006) and expanded upon the features that had not yet been examined in previous EIT studies: focus on a single grammatical form (specifically, passive construction in English) and strict control of time by providing optimal time latency between the completion of the stimulus and the moment the participant repeats the utterance. This EIT included sentences with grammatical errors that participants were expected to correct. The researchers’ goal was to measure implicit grammatical knowledge through the use of an EIT alone with four tests (an aural grammaticality judgment task, a written grammaticality judgment task, error correction tasks, and oral production tasks) that are hypothesized as measures of implicit or explicit knowledge. Results from each task showed that L2 learners had high performance scores on the written tasks (posited to tap into explicit grammatical knowledge) and low to medium
performance scores on the listening/speaking tasks (posited to reflect implicit grammatical knowledge). These results indicated that the EIT is indeed a measure of implicit knowledge.

Unlike the EIT used in the Spada et al. (2015) study, the EIT used by Wu and Ortega (2013) contained no ungrammatical sentences and followed the original design of the English EIT designed by Ortega, Iwashita, Rabie, and Norris (2002). The purpose of the study was to investigate the validity of a newly developed Chinese EIT (Zhou & Wu, 2009). Eighty L2 Chinese learners from a university in the United States completed three tasks: an oral narrative, a background information questionnaire, and the Chinese EIT. During the oral narrative, participants saw a series of connected images and were asked to tell a story based on those images. For the EIT, participants listened to a series of 30 stimuli and after a 2.5-second pause were expected to repeat back what they heard. The total time for this EIT was between 9 and 10 minutes, and the scoring protocol established by Ortega et al. (2002) was used to evaluate participants’ performances. Descriptive statistics were used to test the validity of the EIT. Ability levels (low or high), defined by the institution the learners were from, and the learning backgrounds of the learners were compared with the EIT scores. Learners were classified as either high or low level and were either heritage-language learners (HLLs) or foreign-language learners (FLLs). As expected, high-ability learners scored higher on the EIT compared to low-ability learners, and within each level, HLLs outperformed FLLs. Additionally, learners with a higher EIT score evidenced better communicative abilities on the oral narrative task. These results suggest that the Chinese EIT is a valid measure for testing oral proficiency.

Similar to the Wu and Ortega (2013) study, the purpose of the EIT used by Tracy-Ventura, McManus, Norris, and Ortega (2014) was to test the validity and reliability of the newly
developed French EIT. The learners in the study were 29 French students who had completed two years of French instruction at a British university. For the EIT, a native French speaker created 30 sentences using the English sentences from Ortega et al. (2002) as a guide. A second native French speaker checked the sentences for syllable length and naturalness. During this EIT, a 2-second pause was inserted after the target sentence, and a 0.5-second beep was heard, signaling learners to repeat back the target sentence. EIT scores were based on the scoring rubric developed by Ortega, Iwashita, Rabie, and Norris (1999). Along with the EIT, the 29 learners completed several other tasks (a general oral interview, an oral retelling of a picture-based narrative, a written argumentative essay, and a vocabulary recognition task). Regarding the EIT and the other tasks completed by learners, there was a significant relationship between the EIT scores and both oral tasks.

In another EIT study with a focus on learners of French, Gaillard, and Tremblay (2016) had the goal of evaluating the validity, reliability, discriminability, and practicality of using an EIT to measure the linguistic competence of L2 learners. As the study was carried out before the Tracy-Ventura et al. (2014) study, participants in the study used an EIT developed by the researchers. The 30 English sentences used in Ortega et al. (2002) were translated into French, and 20 additional sentences were created using French textbooks. Unlike the previous studies, learners’ repetitions of the stimuli were analyzed on a 7-point scale based on meaning, syntax, morphology, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Learners also completed a cloze test, and a strong relationship was observed between scores on both the EIT and a cloze test. The results of the study show evidence that the EIT is a valid measure of L2 proficiency.
Bowden (2016) used a Spanish EIT (Ortega, Iwashita, Rabie, & Norris, 1999) to test the oral proficiency of 37 native English speakers learning Spanish as an L2. As the simulated oral proficiency interview (SOPI) is an accepted and standardized measure, it was used along with the Spanish EIT in order to determine comparability between the two measures. The participants in this study had varied L2 experience and were divided into three broad levels: low experience, advanced experience, and very advanced experience. The first group of participants (low experience) had no immersion experience and were enrolled in second- to fourth-semester university-level Spanish courses (n = 15). The advanced experience group had a mean of 6.7 semesters of formal Spanish courses and one to two semesters of immersion experience (n = 15). Those in the very advanced experience group had at least 19 months of immersion experience (n = 7). Out of a score of 120 on the EIT, participants' scores ranged from 13 to 119. For the purpose of data analysis, each ACTFL proficiency level and sublevel was converted to a numerical score according to a formula used by Henning (1992). Thus, the SOPI was out of 3.0, and scores ranged from 0.8 to 3.0 (Novice-High to Superior). Correlations were calculated between both assessments, and results showed that the EIT and SOPI were highly correlated, which suggests the EIT has high external validity and provides a comparable measure of overall oral proficiency to the commonly used SOPI.

In an effort to contribute to this body of literature, and to better understand early stage university-level language, the present study employed tasks parallel to those used by Bowden (2016), namely, a SOPI and the EIT in order to probe oral proficiency levels of learners with one year of instruction.
A detailed description of the experimental design of this study is provided in this chapter. The first section provides an overall description of the procedures and tasks used. Subsequent sections describe each element of the design in detail in the following manner: a description of the participants followed by the tasks used to assess participants’ linguistic abilities. The final section provides an explanation of the analyses performed to address the research question.

Overall Research Design

This study aimed to measure the oral proficiency levels of learners with one year of instruction. Two measures of L2 Spanish oral proficiency were completed in order to provide a comprehensive and fine-grained view of oral proficiency: a computer-based SOPI and an EIT (task details provided below). The inclusion of two independent measures allowed for an exploration of oral proficiency in a contextualized and communicative format (SOPI) as well as providing information on the overall oral proficiency of learners by using a highly standardized and controlled testing measure (EIT).
Participants

Participants were native English speakers born and raised in the United States. Data from two male and four female participants, between 19 and 21 years of age (mean = 20.2), are included in analyses. Of the six participants, only one participant reported a second native language (Korean), which was the primary home language. All other participants reported English as being their only native language. Three of the participants were completing their third year of university study, while two were completing their second year, and one was in the last year of their program. In terms of experience with Spanish, at the time of testing, all participants had completed two semesters of university-level Spanish instruction at a public university in the southeastern United States. None of the participants had received any formal Spanish instruction prior to high school; however, most (five) completed one year of high school Spanish before entering college, and one student started Spanish at the university level. No participant reported any study of an additional L2. While one participant had taken several short vacations to Spanish-speaking countries, and another participant reported a month-long stay in a Spanish-speaking country, neither one reported any efforts to try to use or learn Spanish during those experiences. Despite five of the six participants having prior Spanish instruction, they represent the closest approximation to “true beginner” (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005) that we were able to obtain in a university setting. During a pretest questionnaire, all participants reported feeling that they had never been more proficient in Spanish than they were at the time of testing.

The six participants were enrolled in a short-term university-sponsored summer study abroad program in Santander, Spain, and all data were collected during their first week of this
study abroad program. This program was designed for "intermediate-level" learners of Spanish (i.e., those who had completed the equivalent of two semesters of college-level Spanish prior to departure).

Materials

Participant Language History

Language History Questionnaire

Participants provided extensive information about their language background on the language history questionnaire, including childhood and later experience with any first and additional languages, as well as their experience with Spanish. The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine whether participants were eligible to participate in the study and to provide information regarding language experience that may impact their oral proficiency.

Measures of L2 Spanish Abilities

Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview

Learners in this study completed an abbreviated version of the SOPI. This task presented learners with a variety of situations, such as describing activities, narrating a story, giving an apology, and convincing others. It elicits spoken language as learners answer questions based on a provided scenario. Each prompt is presented to participants both aurally and visually (in text on the computer screen). Two equivalent versions of the SOPI were used, both comprising a total of
four scenarios to which the learner was required to respond with (1) a description or (2-4) an answer to a question.

For the first scenario, participants were shown an image. Participants heard and read the instructions in English, and after a 15-second pause (this comprised the planning time), participants heard the prompt question, which was asked in Spanish. One minute and 20 seconds were given to participants to respond to the prompt. Images and scenarios used in both versions are presented in Figure 1.

For the remaining three prompts, participants were not given an image but were instead asked to respond to various situations while studying abroad in different Spanish-speaking countries. As with the first prompt, after the prompt was given in English, participants had 15 seconds to prepare their response before a prompt question, given in Spanish, was asked. For example, a participant would hear and read the following instructions in English:

You are staying with a host family while studying abroad in Ecuador. In preparation for your upcoming day trip with your classmates to Cotopaxi National Park, your host sister, Marta, lends you a guidebook. When you return home, Marta asks you if you enjoyed your trip and whether the guidebook was useful. After you hear this question, tell her about the guidebook, apologize for losing it, and offer to replace it with another.

After a 15-second pause (planning time), participants would hear the prompt question: ¿Te resultó útil el libro que te presté? (Was the book that I lent you useful?) and would be given 55 seconds to respond. As with the EIT, participants completed this task at their leisure without the presence of the researcher.
Digitally recorded participant responses to the SOPI prompts were transcribed by the researcher. Responses were then evaluated using the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, described in more detail below.

Imagine that you are visiting friends in Ecuador. Your friends are talking about going to the beach. One of your friends, Pablo, asks you to describe the kinds of activities people usually do at the beach in the U.S. You may use the picture of the facing page or your own experience as a source of ideas. You will have 15 seconds to prepare your answer. Then, after Pablo asks his question, you will have one minute and 20 seconds for your response. Remember to wait for Pablo’s question before you describe for him the kinds of activities people usually do at the beach.

Daniel, a student from Peru, has recently arrived at your school. He asks you to tell him about the typical daily routine of a student in the United States. Using the series of pictures as a source of ideas, describe for Daniel the typical daily routine of a student in the U.S. You will have one minute and 20 seconds for your answer. Study the pictures now and wait for Daniel’s question before you describe for him the typical daily routine of a student in the United States.

Figure 1. First scenario in versions A (1a) and B (1b) of the SOPI task.
Data coding and scoring for the simulated oral proficiency interview. Participant responses for each question were digitally recorded. With the 2012 ACTFL Speaking Guidelines used as a guide, participants were given a proficiency score for each response. Along with that proficiency score given, each participant received an overall proficiency score that was based on all answers given. For the purpose of data analysis, each ACTFL proficiency level and sublevel was converted to a numerical score according to a formula used by other researchers (e.g., Dandonoli & Henning, 1990; Kenyon & Tschirner, 2000; Thompson, 1996), proposed by Lange and Lowe (1987). If a participant’s numerical score was between proficiency levels, their rating was rounded down to the lower level. Table 2 shows the SOPI rating, based on the ACTFL OPI rating, and a numerical equivalent used for data analysis. An example prompt question, together with two different participant transcriptions and sample ratings are provided in Table 3.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOPI rating</th>
<th>Numerical equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice Low</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice Mid</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice High</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Low</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Mid</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Low</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Mid</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced High</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguished</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from Thompson (1996).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Participant Response</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Numerical Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lo siento mucho, pero no podemos devolverle su dinero.</td>
<td>Uh la boda de mi hermana es muy importante para mí tú necesita vuelve los dólares a mí</td>
<td>NH</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Um, puedo por favor lo tener porque yo necesito el dinero</td>
<td>NM</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué crees que debo hacer?</td>
<td>Oh Martín, tú necesitas estudiar en otro países porque es muy divertido y um bonita es muy muy mejor que estudie-estudios en uh la um university universidad de Estados Unidos.</td>
<td>NH</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hola Martín, tú estudias en another country es importante</td>
<td></td>
<td>NL</td>
<td>.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Te resultó útil el libro que te presté?</td>
<td>Lo siento Marta yo no sé adónde la libro es uh yo busco pero oh vale. Lo siento Marta yo busco por la libro pero no sé adónde va uh adónde es yo quiero um compro tu otro porque yo muy muy triste yo quiero uh compro otro por favor mucho um lo siento mucho</td>
<td>NH</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hola Marta, gracias por la lib-un libro um pero no no um, lo siento no lo sé un libro</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td>.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elicited Imitation Task

Stimuli from the Spanish EIT developed by Ortega, Iwashita, Rabie, and Norris (1999) were modified to create two comparable versions of the sentence repetition task (Faretta-Stutenberg & Morgan-Short, 2018). This task required examinees to listen to and repeat a series of stimulus sentences, which increased in length and complexity (Ortega, 2000; Ortega, Iwashita, Norris, & Rabie, 1999). The EIT began with aural instructions and five practice sentences in English. Then 30 Spanish sentences were presented aurally, one at a time. Participants heard a sentence followed by a pause and a beep. After the beep, participants repeated what they heard, to the best of their ability. This task serves as a measure of overall proficiency. Speakers should only be able to accurately imitate if they have comprehended and parsed the sentences through their developing grammars (e.g., Bley-Vroman & Chaudron, 1994; Bowden, 2016; Vinther, 2002). A two-second pause and a half-second beep followed each stimulus so that participants were not able to immediately repeat back what they heard. This was done to avoid participants being able to parrot back the stimuli (Vinther, 2002). Participant responses were digitally recorded, and each item (30 sentences) was scored on a scale of zero to four points, following the protocol established by Ortega (2000). The EIT took approximately 9 minutes to complete. Each participant completed this task at their leisure without the presence of the researcher. Participants were asked to record their responses and upload them via a computer.

Data coding and scoring for the EIT. Digitally recorded participant responses for each of the 30 stimuli were transcribed by two independent raters. Next, the same two raters, trained on the scoring protocol established by Ortega (2000; abbreviated version provided in Table 4),
independently scored each stimulus-response. Each sentence repetition was assigned a score from zero to four points based on accuracy in comparison with the target stimulus. The independent ratings were compared, with any discrepancies resolved before a final agreement was reached on all ratings. Inter-rater reliability prior to discussion and consensus on all items was .877. The maximum score for the EIT is 120 points. Example stimuli, together with sample ratings and participant transcriptions, are provided in Table 5.

Table 4

Spanish Elicited Imitation Task Scoring Criteria (Abbreviated)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Exact repetition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Original meaning preserved. Use of some synonyms or changes in grammar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>More than half of content preserved. Slight changes to content make ambiguous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>At least half of content is preserved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Only one word given. Silence, unintelligible content given.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from Ortega et al. (1999).
Table 5

Elicited Imitation Task Sample Stimuli and Scoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Stimulus</th>
<th>Sample Participant</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Quiero cortarme el pelo. ‘I want to cut (reflexive) the hair.’</td>
<td>Quiero cortarmi mi pelo.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Él se ducha cada mañana. ‘He showers (reflexive) every morning.’</td>
<td>Él se duche para mañana.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Dudo que sepa manejar muy bien. ‘I doubt that s/he drives very well.’</td>
<td>Todo que sepiar muy bien.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Las calles de esta ciudad son muy anchas. ‘The streets of this city are very wide.’</td>
<td>Las calles de esta en ciudad muy anchas.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Las calles de esta ciudad son muy anchas. ‘The streets of this city are very wide.’</td>
<td>Las calles estabas en muy jenchas.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) El chico con el que yo salgo es español. ‘The boy with whom I go out is Spanish.’</td>
<td>El chico on que se año es español.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Participant</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiero cortal el pelo.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Él se duche para mañana.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todo que sepiar muy bien.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las calles enches mor...xxx</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El chico con es algo es también</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The present study was designed to address the following research question: What level of oral proficiency do learners studying a Category I language (Spanish) reach after one year of university-level language study? In order to address this question, scores on two global measures of oral proficiency were examined for learners who had completed the equivalent of one year of university-level study of Spanish.

Based on the extant literature, it was hypothesized that after one year of study, learners of Spanish would reach a Novice-High level of oral proficiency. Descriptive statistics for the SOPI and EIT are provided in Table 6. As can be seen, even within a group of learners with similar Spanish learning backgrounds, there is a wide range of scores for both the EIT (ranging from 6 to 42 out of a possible 120) and the SOPI (0.3 to 0.8, out of 3.0, which equates to scores ranging from Novice-Mid to Novice-High).

Of the six participants, four reached a Novice-Mid level of oral proficiency, with the remaining two learners scoring Novice-Low and Novice-High, respectively. Furthermore, the mean, median, and mode scores were all in the Novice-Mid range. While it was predicted that learners after one year of university-level instruction of a Category I language would reach a Novice-High level of oral proficiency, the results of the present study indicate Novice-Mid is a more realistic expectation for these learners.
Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for the EIT and the SOPI for Each Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>EIT Score</th>
<th>SOPI Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.68 (NM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.28 (NL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.33 (NM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.68 (NM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.80 (NH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.68 (NM)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean (SD) 22.5 (12.09) .58 (.2) (NM)
Median 21 .68
Mode 21 .68
Range 6 - 42 .28 - .80

Note. Maximum scores were 120 for the EIT and 3.0 for the SOPI. NL = Novice Low; NM = Novice Mid; NH = Novice High. Participant names have been changed for anonymity.

Previous research has indicated a high correlation between participant scores on the EIT and the SOPI, suggesting that the EIT has high external validity and is comparable to the SOPI (Bowden, 2016). Research Question 2 asked whether EIT scores would correlate with SOPI scores within this group of learners and on the abbreviated version of the SOPI utilized. In order to probe the relationship between scores on the two tasks in the present sample, correlational analyses were conducted. Results of correlational analyses revealed a correlation of $r = .421$ (Pearson’s coefficient), which indicates a weak correlation between EIT and SOPI scores (Moore, Notz & Fligner, 2013). The relationship between EIT and SOPI scores is displayed visually in Figure 2, where each participant's SOPI score is plotted along the x-axis, their EIT score is plotted along the y-axis, and scores for each participant can be seen displayed together in Figure 2.
Interestingly, the participant with the highest EIT score (42) and the participant with the lowest EIT score (6) received the same rating on the SOPI (0.68 = Novice-Mid). As a result of the EIT and SOPI measuring different types of linguistic knowledge, participants' EIT and SOPI scores may not equally reflect their oral proficiency competence. The participants who scored higher on the EIT may evidence a higher level of comprehension of the stimuli and thus were better able to imitate it, while those who performed better on the SOPI may evidence higher levels of oral proficiency (e.g., Bowden, 2016; Vinther, 2002). Some background information about the participants could also explain higher SOPI scores. For example, the participant who scored the lowest on the EIT (6) and reached Novice-Mid proficiency on the SOPI reported several visits to a Spanish-speaking country for vacation between ages 8 and 15.
Returning to Research Question 1 (What level of oral proficiency do learners studying a Category I language [Spanish] reach after one year of university-level language study?), it was predicted that learners would reach a Novice-High level of oral proficiency. However, the hypothesis was not supported in the present data. Based on the limited extant literature, learners in the present study were expected to evidence Novice-High level of oral proficiency. Let us turn to the research that informed the hypothesis for the present study.

To my knowledge, only one published study directly compares with the current participant population (Magnan, 1986). After one year, the median score was Intermediate-Low/Mid, and the range of scores was Novice-Mid to Intermediate-Mid/High. However, there is another comparable study (Lee, 2000), whose participants studied a Category I language, but instead focused on learners who had completed between one and a half and two years of Spanish language instruction. Lee (2000) found that learners completing their second year of study of Spanish evidenced a range of scores from Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-Mid, with a median score of Intermediate-Mid. Another is that of Tschirner (1992), whose participants had one year of instruction but were studying a Category II language (German). Learners in this study had a range of scores (Novice-High to Intermediate-Mid), with most learners (80%) falling into the Intermediate range. Finally, the one participant in the Iwasaki (2007) study who had completed one year of university-level Japanese reached an Intermediate-Low level.
As learners in the Magnan (1986) study had a varying amount of study abroad experience and prior exposure to the language in high school, it seemed appropriate to lower the oral proficiency rating expected of the learners in the present study.

Based on SOPI scores, the data analyzed here suggest that learners who are native speakers of English completing their first year of university-level instruction of a Category I language are likely to reach a Novice-Mid level of oral proficiency. How do these results compare to LTI data?

The typical length of an academic year at the university level is 32 weeks, with learners completing approximately 80 hours of instruction during this period. LTI guidelines suggest that minimal-aptitude learners should be expected to reach an Advanced-Mid level of oral proficiency after 24 weeks of instruction. Important to note; however, is that LTI guidelines indicate that learners should have completed a total of 720 hours of instruction during this 24-week period (see Table 7 for LTI guidelines related to a Category 1 language). Not only this, but LTI data is based on a classroom size of one to four learners who are completing either a full-time intensive or immersion proficiency-based language program.

Furthermore, the differences between LTI guidelines’ stated expectations and the typical university language course in terms of classroom size and study intensity, as well as the fact that the proficiency-level expectations for LTI start after 240 hours and eight weeks of such instruction, make it difficult to use LTI guidelines to inform university-level course expectations.

Importantly, even within this small group of participants, a wide range of scores was evidenced on both the EIT and SOPI. All participants were students participating in a study abroad program. It may be in this case that these participants chose to study abroad because they
were highly engaged and motivated to learn Spanish, thus not representative of a typical L2 classroom learner group. On the other hand, it is important to note that the five-week study abroad program allowed students to complete the last two semesters of the required four-semester language course sequence. As such, it may be the case that these learners were more motivated to complete language requirements of the bachelor’s degree which would have taken 30 weeks of study at their home university as opposed to the five weeks the study abroad opportunity presented (Carroll, 1981; DeKeyser, 2010; Hernández, 2010). Thus, this group is likely representative of the L2 Spanish learner population in a typical university setting.

Descriptive statistics for the two measures of oral proficiency - the EIT and the SOPI - are displayed in Table 6.

Table 7

Oral Proficiency Rating Based on Aptitude Level and Length of Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Training</th>
<th>Minimal Aptitude</th>
<th>Average Aptitude</th>
<th>Superior Aptitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 weeks (240 hours)</td>
<td>Intermediate Low</td>
<td>Intermediate Mid</td>
<td>Intermediate Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 weeks (480 hours)</td>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
<td>Advanced Low</td>
<td>Advanced Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 weeks (720 hours)</td>
<td>Advanced Mid</td>
<td>Advanced High</td>
<td>Superior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although LTI guidelines do not directly inform the interpretation of the present results, comparison can be made with previous research that examined university-level learners completing one year of academic instruction. Only OPI scores from studies of university-level learners with one year of instruction are displayed in Table 8 to facilitate a comparison between the results of the present study and those of previous research with similar learner groups.
Table 8

Previous Research on Learners with One Year of University-Level Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Language &amp; Category</th>
<th>Range of Proficiency Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present Study (N=6)</td>
<td>Spanish - I</td>
<td>NL-NH (NM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tschirner (1992) (N=168)</td>
<td>German - II</td>
<td>NH-IH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson (1996) (N=6)</td>
<td>Russian - III</td>
<td>NL/NM-IL/IM (NM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iwasaki (2007) (N=1)</td>
<td>Japanese - IV</td>
<td>IL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Median scores are provided in parenthesis. NL = Novice-Low; NM = Novice-Mid; NH = Novice-High; IL = Intermediate-Low; IM = Intermediate-Mid; IH = Intermediate-High.*

The present study found that learners had an overall lower range of oral proficiency scores (Novice-Low to Novice-High) and a lower median score (Novice-Mid) than first-year learners in the Magnan (1986) study, the only previous study examining a Category I language. However, there is some overlap in the range of scores between both the current study and the Magnan (1986) study.

Similarly, Tschirner (1992), who tested learners studying German (a Category II language), found that after one year, learners evidenced scores from Novice-High to Intermediate-High, with most students (76.2%) reaching an Intermediate-Mid level. Despite French and German being categorized into different language categories, overlap in proficiency
scores among both groups of learners exist. The larger sample size obtained in the Tschirner (1992) study could have allowed for more accurate mean value and the identification of outliers.

Similar to the present study, Thompson (1996) found that learners completing one year of university-level instruction in Russian (a Category III language) had a range of scores from Novice-Low/Novice-Mid to Intermediate-Low/Intermediate-Mid, with Novice-Mid as the average level attained. Although students completing Russian evidenced a wider range of scores, both the Thompson (1996) study and the present study had learners attain a median score of Novice-Mid.

The Iwasaki (2007) study had a single participant complete the OPI after one year of university-level language instruction in Japanese (a Category IV language). The student reached an Intermediate-Low level of oral proficiency at the end of a year of study. While this rating is higher than other learners obtained after studying languages LTI classified as “easier,” it is important to note that this student was preparing to study abroad and reported wanting to “improve in all areas of the Japanese language.” Differences in learner motivation likely mediate the relationship between the hours of instruction and the development of oral proficiency.

Based on the results from the previous studies, a possible reason for the lower than expected oral proficiency levels attained by learners in the present study is the small sample size. In addition to this, learners in the Magnan (1986) study had varying amounts of prior exposure to the target language. Some had also been to a country where the target language is spoken. Furthermore, previous experience with the target language was not reported in the Tschirner (1992), Thompson (1996), or Iwasaki (2007) studies.
In regard to two of the learners having the same SOPI score, yet one receiving the lowest EIT score and the other receiving the highest, it may be the case that the learner who scored lower on the EIT developed skills that would allow them to perform better on the communicative SOPI than on the EIT, which arguably requires more interpretive and language encoding skills (e.g., Bowden, 2016). The results from the present study were contra Bowden’s (2016) results, which found that the SOPI and EIT were highly correlated ($r = .911$). Although the present results do not suggest a strong correlation between EIT and SOPI scores, it is important to note the small sample size ($n = 6$). Future research with larger participant groups and more background information can better elucidate the relationship between these two proficiency measures for university-level learners. Not only this, but learners in the present study did not complete the full SOPI, but an abbreviated version. Finally, Bowden (2016) looked at learners who completed no less than two semesters of Spanish study and more advanced learners who had at least 19 months of immersion experience, whereas the current study focused on learners who completed the equivalent of one year of Spanish study and had limited experience abroad.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

The present study proposed to determine the level of oral proficiency attainable for students studying a Category I language, such as Spanish, after one year of university-level instruction and how well EIT scores correlated with SOPI scores for the current learner group (students with the equivalent of one year of university-level Spanish instruction).

The median proficiency level of the range of scores presented in this study is Novice-Mid. Although the sample size is small, these results are comparable to other work. Learners in the Lee (2000) study attained Intermediate-Mid after three years of Spanish study at the university level. However, it is reasonable to expect for students completing less instruction to have overall lower levels of oral proficiency. Interestingly, there is some overlap between the range of scores from the present study and those in Lee (2000), as some learners in both studies reached the Novice-High level. Not only that, but these results cannot be generalized because as the sample of six students is small, which may also explain the negative correlation between EIT and SOPI scores found in the current study.

Future Directions

The results of the present study should be interpreted with an understanding of its limitations. First, the sample size for this study was relatively small. Therefore, there is a need for a follow-up study that increases the number of participants and looks at learners from
multiple universities as a way to better generalize the results. Along with a small sample size, the present study only used an abbreviated version of the SOPI task for each student. The entire SOPI task should be administered to each student in the future in order to get a more well-rounded overview of learner oral proficiency. More languages should be examined to add to our understanding of language difficulty rankings for learners at the university level.

As there was a wide range of proficiency scores reached for this study as well as previous studies, there should be a focus on factors such as individual differences in motivation and aptitude. LTI recognizes aptitude as an important measure in determining what level learners can be expected to reach after a specified amount of time. Learner background is also an important factor as high school and study abroad experience can contribute to higher oral proficiency ratings (Magnan, 1986).

Further, as the EIT and SOPI scores were not correlated, contra Bowden (2016), this suggests a further need for research to see how both tasks compare and whether they may tap into different aspects of proficiency (Spada et al., 2015).

This study presents a starting point for future research by pointing out that hours of instruction and prior experience in the target language are critical factors in oral proficiency scores. Not only this, but other factors that may also impact proficiency scores should be examined.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE
Background Questionnaire
(adapted from Marian, Blumenfeld, & Kaushanskaya, 2007)

Participant Number
Date
Date of Birth
Gender
Year in School
How many years of formal education do you have?
Please check your highest education level (or the approximate US equivalent to a degree obtained in another country)
Please check your FATHER’S highest education level (or the approximate US equivalent to a degree obtained in another country)
Please check your MOTHER’S highest education level (or the approximate US equivalent to a degree obtained in another country)
Date of immigration to the US, if applicable
If you have ever immigrated to another country, please provide name of country and date of immigration here
Please mark the category/categories that best describe your ethnic background.
Please list all the languages you know in order of acquisition
Please list all the languages you know in order of dominance
Have you ever traveled to a Spanish-speaking country prior to this study?
Duration of Travel
Have you ever held residence in a Spanish-speaking country prior to this study?
Duration of Residence

Questions regarding NATIVE LANGUAGE #1
[this section repeated for NATIVE LANGUAGE #2, etc, if applicable]

- Age of Exposure to Native Language #1
- Place of exposure to Native Language #1
- Proficiency in Native Language #1 [Reading]
- Proficiency in Native Language #1 [Understanding]
- Proficiency in Native Language #1 [Writing]
- Proficiency in Native Language #1 [Speaking]
- For the following 3 items, please list the number of years and months you spent in each language environment:
  a. A family where Native Language #1 is spoken
  b. A SCHOOL and/ or WORK environment where Native Language #1 is spoken
  c. Comments about Native Language #1
Background questionnaire, continued

Questions regarding OTHER LANGUAGE #1
[This section repeated for OTHER LANGUAGE #2 and OTHER LANGUAGE #3, if applicable]

- Age of Exposure to Other Language #1
- In what situation did you learn Other Language #1? (Mark all that apply.)
- At what age were you most fluent in Other Language #1?
- Proficiency in Other Language #1 [Speaking]
- Proficiency in Other Language #1 [Understanding]
- Proficiency in Other Language #1 [Reading]
- Proficiency in Other Language #1 [Writing]
- In what contexts have you received formal instruction in Other Language #1? (high school, immersion program, etc.)
- How many years of formal instruction in Other Language #1 have you had?
- For the following 3 items, please list the number of years and months you spent in each language environment:
  a. A FAMILY where Other Language #1 is spoken
  b. A SCHOOL and/or WORK environment where Other Language #1 is spoken
  c. Comments about Other Language #1
APPENDIX B

ELICITED IMITATION TASK
Elicited Imitation Task (EIT)

Version A
(adapted from Ortega et al. (1999) by Faretta-Stutenberg & Morgan-Short, 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Stimulus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Quiero cortarme el pelo (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>El libro está en la mesa (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>El carro lo tiene Pedro (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El se ducha cada mañana (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>¿Qué dice usted que va a hacer hoy? (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dudo que sepa manejar muy bien (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Las calles de esta ciudad son muy anchas (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Puede que llueva mañana todo el día (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Las casas son muy bonitas pero caras (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Me gustan las películas que acaban bien (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>El chico con el que yo salgo es español (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Después de cenar me fui a dormir tranquilo (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Quiero una casa en la que vivan mis animales (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>A nosotros nos fascinan las fiestas grandiosas (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ella sólo bebe cerveza y no come nada (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Me gustaría que el precio de las casas bajara (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Cruzar a la derecha y después sigue todo recto (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ella ha terminado de pintar su apartamento (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Me gustaría que empezara a hacer más calor pronto (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>El niño al que se le murió el gato está triste (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Una amiga mía cuida a los niños de mi vecino (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>El gato que era negro fue perseguido por el perro (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Antes de poder salir él tiene que limpiar su cuarto (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>La cantidad de personas que fuman ha disminuido (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Después de llegar a casa del trabajo tomé la cena (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>El ladrón al que atrapó la policía era famoso (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Le pedí a un amigo que me ayudara con la tarea (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>El examen no fue tan difícil como me habían dicho (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>¿Serías tan amable de darme el libro que está en la mesa? (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Hay mucha gente que no toma nada para el desayuno (17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Version B
(created as a parallel version of the Ortega et al. (1999) Spanish EIT by Faretta-Stutenberg & Morgan-Short, 2018)

Sentence Stimulus

1 Quiero comerme el huevo. (7)
2 El pez está en la sala. (7)
3 La tarea la tiene Carla. (8)
4 Él se duerme por la tarde. (8)
5 ¿Qué dijo que iba a acabar hoy? (9)
6 Dudo que sepan hablar Portugués. (10)
7 Las casas de este país son muy grandes. (11)
8 Puede que haga mucho calor esta noche. (12)
9 Los coches son muy baratos pero feos. (12)
10 Me gusta la comida que es saludable. (12)
11 La chica con la que yo bailo es chilena. (13)
12 Antes de correr me comí una manzana. (13)
13 Quiero un coche en el que quepa mi familia. (14)
14 A ellos les encantan los libros de romance. (14)
15 Él siempre tiene hambre porque no sabe cocinar. (15)
16 Me gustaría que el hijo de mi tía comiera. (15)
17 Cruce la calle y después vaya a la derecha. (15)
18 Él ha empezado a entrenar con sus amigos. (15)
19 Me gustaría que el semestre terminara pronto. (15)
20 El bebé al que se le cayó la manta tiene frío. (16)
21 Una amiga mía va a la capital con sus sobrinos. (16)
22 La princesa que era muy bonita fue rescatada. (16)
23 Después de comer, siempre tiene que lavarse los dientes. (16)
24 La cantidad de personas que votan ha incrementado. (17)
25 Antes de poder salir de la casa busqué mis llaves. (17)
26 El jefe al que atacó el empleado era gordo. (17)
27 Le pedí a mi hermana que me ayudara en la casa. (17)
28 El trabajo no fue tan fácil como me habían dicho. (17)
29 ¿Te importaría traerme el café que dejé en la cocina? (18)
30 Hay muchas personas que se quedan en casa si nieva mucho. (18)
APPENDIX C

SIMULATED ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW
SOPI Version A

1. Imagine that you are visiting friends in Ecuador. Your friends are talking about going to the beach. One of your friends, Pablo, asks you to describe the kinds of activities people usually do at the beach in the U.S. You may use the picture on the facing page or your own experience as a source of ideas. You will have 15 seconds to prepare your answer. Then, after Pablo asks his question, you will have one minute and 20 seconds for your response. Remember to wait for Pablo's question before you describe for him the kinds of activities people usually do at the beach. (15 sec / 1 min 20 sec)

2. You are participating in a language exchange program in Cali, Colombia. One day, you decide to go out on a short trip. Because the weather has been rainy, the daughter of your hosts, Norma, has lent you an umbrella. On your way home, you realize that you have lost the umbrella. When you return home, Norma asks you if you enjoyed your trip. She also asks if you had to use the umbrella. After you hear her question, tell her about the umbrella, apologize for losing it, and offer to replace it with another. (15 sec / 55 sec)
SOPI Version A, continued

3. You are studying abroad in Madrid and are scheduled to go to Barcelona on an excursion for exchange students. Several days after you have paid the organizer, Mrs. Molina, for the trip, you discover that the trip conflicts with the date of your host sister's wedding. You have asked Mrs. Molina for a refund, but she is reluctant to give it to you. After she expresses her reluctance, convince her to refund your money. (15 sec / 1 min 5 sec)

4. You are an exchange student in Panama. You are talking with your friend Raúl about his plans after graduation. He is debating whether to accept a temporary job in his field or to travel for the summer. Raúl asks you for your advice on this matter. After Raúl asks his question, advise him, from your point of view, on what to do. (15 sec / 1 min)

SOPI Version B

1. Daniel, a student from Peru, has recently arrived at your school. He asks you to tell him about the typical daily routine of a student in the United States. Using the series of pictures as a source of ideas, describe for Daniel the typical daily routine of a student in the U.S. You will have one minute and 20 seconds for your answer. Study the pictures now, and wait for Daniel's question before you describe for him the typical daily routine of a student in the United States. (15 sec / 1 min 20 sec)
2. You are staying with a family while studying abroad in Ecuador. In preparation for your upcoming day trip with your classmates in Colopaxi National Park, your host sister, Marta, lends you a guidebook. On the trip home, you realize you have lost the guidebook. When you return home, Marta asks you if you enjoyed her trip and whether the guidebook was useful. After you hear her question, tell her about the guidebook, apologize for losing it, and offer to replace it with another. (15 sec / 55 sec)

3. You are studying abroad in Buenos Aires and are scheduled to go to Montevideo on a group excursion with your classmates. Several days after you have paid your reservation fee to the organizer, Mrs. Gonzalez, you discover that the trip conflicts with the date of your host sister's college graduation ceremony. You have informed Mrs. Gonzalez and asked for a refund, but she is reluctant to give it to you. After she expresses her reluctance, convince her to refund your money. (15 sec / 1 min 5 sec)

4. You are an exchange student in Colombia. You are talking with your friend Martín about his plans for the summer. He is debating whether to enroll in a summer class on campus or to study abroad. Martín asks you for your advice on this matter. After Martin asks his question, advise him, from your point of view, on what to do. (15 sec / 1 min)