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Building Global Citizens: The Benefits of Teaching Towards Communicative Proficiency in the Foreign Language Classroom

Martha Aguirre
Illinois Wesleyan University

Leah Nillas, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan

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Building Global Citizens:

The Benefits of Teaching Towards Communicative Proficiency in the FL Classroom

Martha A. Aguirre and Leah Nillas*

Educational Studies, Illinois Wesleyan University

Research Question

- ❖ How does teaching towards communicative proficiency promote students' language skills and performance in the classroom?

Literature Review

- ❖ Emphasizing the use of the target language (Thompson & Harrison, 2014) and communicative strategies by using gestures, cognates, scaffolding, etc, (Christie, 2016) improves language output.
- ❖ Incorporating authentic content and contexts promotes a connection to the language and culture (Shrum & Gilsan, 2000; Young, 1999; Weyers, 1999; Heron & Seay, 1991).
- ❖ Utilizing the framework of the national standards and proficiency guidelines help set realistic and attainable goals when assessing and measuring language development (Kaplan, 2016; Majhanovich, 2011). Moreover, the standards give students an opportunity to self-assess their language development (Dolosic, et al., 2016; Brown, 2014).

Methodology

- ❖ Participants were 23 students in a Spanish 1 urban classroom.
- ❖ During 16 weeks, the teacher used the ACTFL standards as a guide for creating lessons plans. After every 2/3 weeks, students were assessed on either their interpersonal speaking, presentational writing, or interpretive reading skills.
- ❖ The ACTFL World Readiness Standards, the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do statements, and the ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Learning Languages were used as a theoretical framework for this study.
- ❖ Data Analysis included analysis of student assessment samples, lesson plans or activities, and video recordings of lessons.

Communicative Proficiency is “the ability to use language in real world situations in a spontaneous interaction and non-rehearsed context, acceptable and appropriate to native speakers of the language” (ACTFL, 2012).

Figure 1. The 3 Modes of Communication (ACTFL, 2012)

| Interpersonal | Interpretive | Presentational |
|--|--|---|
| Two way communication where meaning can be negotiated and adjusted (Speaking/Listening or Reading/Writing) | One way communication where an author's/speaker's message is being interpreted. No negotiated meaning. (Reading/Listening) | One way communication where a speaker/author creates a message. No opportunity for negotiation of meaning. (Speaking/Writing) |

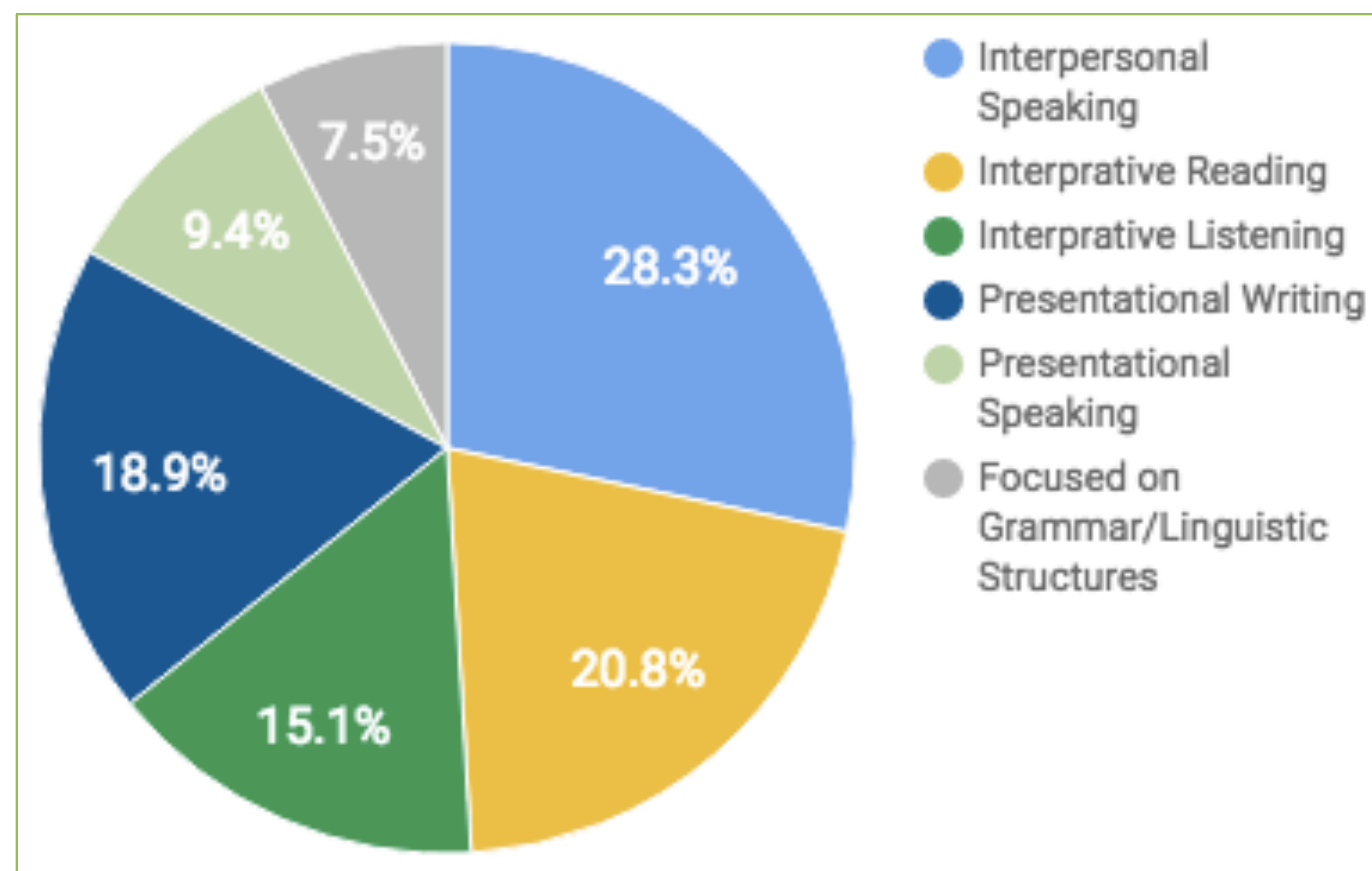


Figure 2. Distribution of learning activities-The chart demonstrates that the modes of communication were consistently used in lessons. However, interpersonal writing activities are missing.

Results and Data Analysis

- ❖ The majority of classroom activities were interpersonal speaking (28.3%) and interpretive writing (20.8%). See Figure 2.
- ❖ 7.5% of activities directly focused on grammar which can inhibit the direct use of the target language (LeLoup, Ponterio, & Warford, 2013). See Figure 2.
- ❖ The class average on the interpretive reading quiz was 17.5/ 20 pts. The class struggled the most with detail recognition.
- ❖ ZPD was used as a teaching strategy in order to scaffold lessons and meet different learning needs.
- ❖ The use of cognates, images, and front-loading information prepared students for the communication activities in class (Christie, 2016; Moeller & Theiler, 2014).
- ❖ A large amount of activities in the lessons were student centered.

Conclusion

- ❖ Making use of authentic content and contexts allows for a stronger connection to the language and culture.
- ❖ Communicating in the target language 90% of the time while incorporating communicative strategies improves language output.
- ❖ Teaching towards communicative proficiency results to a more student centered learning environment
- ❖ Further study should be more longitudinal to show the long term effects and should provide a comparison group.