

# **The help of foreign students in the Second Foreign Language (SFL) classes**

(Report of a Teaching Research Project under the support of the  
國立台灣大學教務處教學發展中心教師發展組)

José Eugenio Borao 鮑曉鷗 FLLD 外文系  
NTU, 16 August 2008

## **Summary**

*It is a common fact among the language teachers of large classes to find themselves helpless in developing the conversational skills of their students. The problem is bigger in Second Foreign Languages for the lack of a close and friendly environment where the student can practice the language. The present research project had explored theoretically and practically how Spanish students (it can be extended to French, German, etc.) can benefit from the possibility for the school of hiring foreign students as language assistants in the Spanish classes (particularly in the Spanish Advanced course, where the research was conducted).*

*The conclusions are that: (1) the conditions to have a regular help from these students are very favorable, because of the increasing number of Spanish speaking students in our campus, the easiness that both groups can interact each other, etc.; (2) the progress in their conversational skills (according the DELE exam standards) was measured very satisfactory; (3) the formal transfer of this model experience to the actual teaching programs only can be implemented if the retribution system of this job is been substantially increased (actually they only can be paid according the “working students salary”, which is 109NT\$/h).*

## **Method**

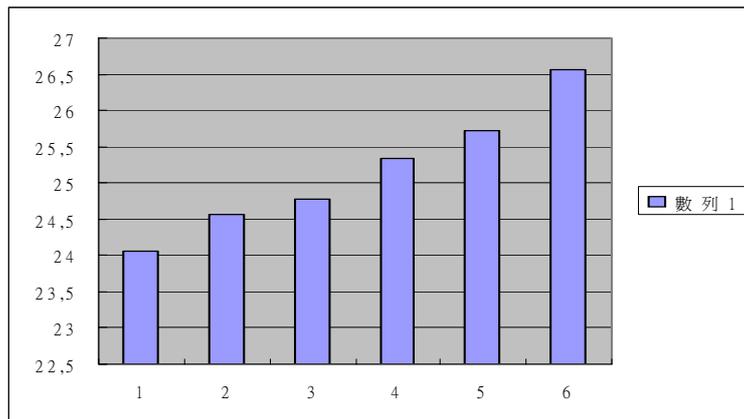
From February to June 2008, I have conducted a teaching research sponsored by the NTU Center for Teaching and Learning Development (CTLD: 國立台灣大學教務處教學發展中心教師發展組) on how foreign students can be of an important help in the Second Foreign Languages classes, especially in developing conversational skills. The five students involved have been the following ones: two Spaniards studying in the Mandarin Center, in an exchange program with the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona (UAB); two Latin American students that are in NTU in a program for students sponsored by the Ministry of Education (MOE), currently enrolled in the Department of International Trade; one hwa-chiao student, enrolled in the Department of Law.

Their cooperation has been significant since they attended all the sessions of the Advanced Spanish class regularly, taking care of five groups of four students each of the course Advanced Spanish. Every class they evaluated the students according to the criteria of the DELE exam, the Spanish International Test organized by the Cervantes Institute (the international official Spanish institution on promoting the language), giving scores according to the following criteria (see the case of the student Clara):

Alumno:	CLARA																		
evaluador:	Natalia				Natalia				EXAMEN Cristian				Natalia						
Primera sección	4 minutos		día 1: 24 III	día 2: 31 III	día 3: 7 IV	día 4: 14 IV	día 5: 21 IV	día 6: 28 IV	día 7:	día 8: 12 V	día 9: 19 V								
Lámina	(máx.)	nota:	rsltd	nota:	rsltd	nota:	rsltd	nota:	rsltd	nota:	rsltd	nota:	rsltd	nota:	rsltd				
Adecuación:	4	4	8	3,5	7	3,9	7,8	3,8	7,6	3,1	6,2	4	8	0	4	8	4	8	
Fluidez:	4	3,8	7,6	3,5	7	3,9	7,8	3,9	7,8	3,4	6,8	4	8	0	4	8	3,8	7,6	
Pronunciación:	4	3,8	3,8	3,6	3,6	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,8	3	3	3,8	3,8	0	3,7	3,7	3,7	3,7	
Gramática:	4	3,5	3,5	3,4	3,4	3,8	3,8	3,9	3,9	3,1	3,1	3,8	3,8	0	3,7	3,7	3,7	3,7	
Léxico:	4	3,5	3,5	3,6	3,6	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,1	3,1	3,8	3,8	0	3,7	3,7	3,7	3,7	
			<b>26,4</b>		<b>24,6</b>		<b>27</b>		<b>26,9</b>		<b>22,2</b>		<b>27,4</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>27,1</b>		<b>26,7</b>
Segunda sección	2-3 minutos																		
Exposición	(máx.)																		
Fluidez:	4	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,8	3,8	4	4	3,2	3,2	4	4	0	3,8	3,8	4	4	
Pronunciación:	4	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,4	3,4	3,8	3,8	0	3,7	3,7	3,8	3,8	
Gramática:	4	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,8	3,8	3,9	3,9	3,1	3,1	3,8	3,8	0	3,7	3,7	3,8	3,8	
Léxico:	4	3,2	3,2	3,5	3,5	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,1	3,1	3,8	3,8	0	3,7	3,7	3,8	3,8	
			<b>13,7</b>		<b>14</b>		<b>15,2</b>		<b>15,5</b>		<b>12,8</b>		<b>15,4</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>14,9</b>		<b>15,4</b>
Tercera sección:	5 minutos																		
Conversación	(máx.)																		
Interacción:	4	4	8	3,7	7,4	3,9	7,8	4	8	3,5	7	4	8	0	4	8	4	8	
Fluidez:	4	3,8	3,8	3,7	3,7	3,8	3,8	4	4	3,2	3,2	4	4	0	4	4	4	4	
Pronunciación:	4	3,5	1,75	3,8	1,9	3,8	1,9	3,9	1,95	3,2	1,6	3,8	1,9	0	3,7	1,85	3,7	1,85	
Gramática:	4	3,5	1,75	3,5	1,75	3,8	1,9	3,8	1,9	3,1	1,55	3,8	1,9	0	3,7	1,85	3,8	1,9	
Léxico:	4	3,8	1,9	3,8	1,9	3,8	1,9	3,9	1,95	3,2	1,6	3,8	1,9	0	3,7	1,85	3,9	1,95	
			<b>17,2</b>		<b>16,7</b>		<b>17,3</b>		<b>17,8</b>		<b>15</b>		<b>17,7</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>17,6</b>		<b>17,7</b>
Equivalencias:	(máx.)																		
Primera sección:	8,5		8,2		7,3		8		8		6,7		8,2				8		8
Segunda sección:	8,5		7,4		7,5		8,1		8,3		6,9		8,2				8		8,3
Tercera sección:	13		12,4		12		12,3		12,6		10,9		12,6				12,5		12,6
Total:	30		<b>28</b>		<b>26,8</b>		<b>28,4</b>		<b>28,9</b>		<b>24,5</b>		<b>29</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>28,5</b>		<b>28,9</b>

The way to understand this table is that student Clara belonged to the group of the “assistant student” Natalia (the seventh day Clara did not come to class). The progression of Clara cannot be clearly seen since she had almost top grades; nevertheless since 31 March to 28 April (excluding the fifth day, when she took a “formal exam” with a different “assistant student”) she had a clear progression: 26,8 < 28,4 < 28,9 < 29. The overall progressions of the students can be summarized in this table that I prepared for a conference<sup>1</sup> on this matter.

<sup>1</sup> José Eugenio Borao Mateo, "La medición del progreso de los estudiantes de lenguas extranjeras." In: *Proceedings of the IX Simposio sobre la didáctica, la cultura y la traducción del español*, Tamkang University, Taipei, 3 May 2008, pp. 1-14.



The table portrays the evolution of the students along the last six weeks, which we devoted to the Intermediate level of the DELE exam. The maximum possible grade was 30, and we can see how their grades ranged from 24 to 26.5 points. Nevertheless, we must say that here we only consider the students who are most regular in attending classes, and they are usually the better ones.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion is as clear as predictable: when the advanced students have the chance to practice a SFL with native speakers on a regularly basis, their level of communication experiences a clear increase. It is obvious that “the regular practice with native speakers leads to a higher level”, but the key finding is to “discover” that in NTU we have the tools that permit this kind of practice, since—after the recent internationalization of the university—the possibility of having native Spanish speakers has increased exponentially. I do not know other languages, but I presume that Spanish is the language that most can benefit from this. First, because traditionally we have many Latin American students (specially from Paraguay and Central America, because their long time diplomatic relations with Taiwan); and second, because the exchange programs with Spanish universities have started to bear fruit (this past school-year two students came from the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona, and next year five of them are expected; besides, others that might come from the universities of Granada and Navarra).

### **Proposal to academic authorities**

If it is thought that teaching development research programs, specifically the present one, have some real application in the improvement of teaching in our university, I propose that the 教務處 should work on finding a special status for these students, including offering a salary as remuneration. The main problem is that if we want to pay the “assistant students” according to the university working- student rates fees (109NT\$/hour) few of them will be willing to take this job. The past semester we were able to find a temporarily formula to increase their salary, but it was something provisional. If we really want to have the help of these selective students, we have to make a reform in the retribution of the “working student salary”, given them a special status as “course assistants” (or something like that) that allows the university to pay them under a new stable formula. In my opinion, and considering that they act as supervised teachers (see the pictures in the annex), they must be granted a salary of at least 400NT\$/hour.

### **Other results of the research**

Other good fruits of this program were:

1. The “assistant students” were very willing in cooperate as examiners in an experiment that I have conducted to determine the level of our Spanish II and Advanced Spanish students, according to the international standard of DELE exams, and Spanish FLPT exam (offered by LTTC), which results I presented recently in another conference. <sup>2</sup>
2. This experience had helped the Spanish teachers create a new course on Conversation that will be modeled after the pattern that we have used during this research. Nevertheless to develop this program more sources will be needed. Precisely, a good way of developing this potential course can be the hiring of these foreign students working under the supervision of formal teachers.

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<sup>2</sup> José Eugenio Borao Mateo, "Algunas observaciones sobre los resultados de los exámenes DELE (Inicial e Intermedio) a partir de pruebas simuladas." In: *Proceedings of the XLIII Congreso of AEPE*, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid, 27-31 July 2008.

3. Another finding of this research was to identify the “Initial DELE” exam level and the FLPT exam level of our students when they finish their Spanish II course (240 cumulative hours of class). The average figures are 67 points in “Initial DELE” (in fact, below the pass grade of 70), and 45 points of FLPT (also below 50 points of the minimum level). To find this equivalence, 20 students (out of a total of 70) took both exams, the first one (24 May 2008), in a simulated manner, and the second one (7 June 2008) in a real manner, after an agreement with the LTTC institution.