

THE BELIEFS OF SELF-IDENTIFIED SUCCESSFUL
LEARNERS OF SPANISH AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**THE BELIEFS OF SELF-IDENTIFIED SUCCESSFUL
LEARNERS OF SPANISH AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL**

by

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the beliefs of self-identified successful learners of Spanish as a foreign language at a Canadian university. Data collection for the case study relied on the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) in combination with an online discussion and individual online interviews. Descriptive profiles of individual participants' beliefs as well as cross-case analysis and comparisons with the literature highlighted the importance of beliefs related to informal opportunities for learning in authentic contexts such as through interactions with native speakers and the target culture. Implications for teaching Spanish include providing opportunities for authentic language practice and access to the target culture. Future studies might compare learning French and Spanish in Canadian contexts.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction to the Study

The claim that learners' beliefs may determine their language learning approach (Ellis, 1994) and behaviour (Gremmo & Riley, 1995; Riley, 1996) has led researchers to investigate the link between learners' language learning beliefs (LLBs) and success in second- and foreign- language (L2) learning. Language learning beliefs have been related to success in language learning through a focus on motivation and language learning strategy use (Tumposky, 1991). Some research linking LLBs and success has provided insight into the beliefs of successful and unsuccessful learners or more proficient and less proficient learners in particular (e.g. Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Peacock, 1999; Samimy & Lee, 1997). Additionally, developments in cognitive psychology in relation to motivation have resulted in an interest in how self-efficacy beliefs and learners' attributions, for example, relate to success in language learning (Williams & Burden, 1997), and some recent studies explore these relationships (e.g. Graham, 2003; Hsieh, 2004; Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002).

A typical approach to the study of LLBs has relied on closed-item questionnaires. In those studies, findings have been usually reported as group measures, whereas a focus on the individual may provide different or additional insights into language learners' beliefs. In fact, some researchers (e.g. Cotterall, 1999) have suggested the usefulness of identifying profiles of LLBs. Additionally, studies that investigate the relationship between beliefs or approaches to language learning and language learning success have

often defined success in terms of final course grades or achievement in proficiency or aptitude tests (e.g. Samimy & Lee, 1997; Victori, 1999). Typically, no other measures of success, such as internal (e.g. self-assessment) rather than external measures, have been used.

In the Canadian context, there has been research on the attitudes of Anglophone learners of French as a second language using the socio-educational model of second language acquisition (see Gardner, 1985), which links attitudes and second language acquisition (SLA), but this model may not equally apply to foreign language learning (Dörnyei, 1990). The literature review conducted for this study did not uncover any research conducted specifically on Spanish learners' language learning beliefs in a Canadian context. The purpose of the present study is to gain insight into the language learning beliefs of self-identified successful language learners of Spanish as a foreign language at a Canadian university. A case study was designed to gain in-depth insight into their language learning beliefs.

Given the difficulty of eliciting people's beliefs, researchers have discussed the methodological issues that need to be considered when exploring LLLBs (e.g. Kalaja, 1995; Victori, 2004). One common approach in this area has been to rely exclusively on questionnaires, but this approach may not provide an accurate or in-depth view of learners' beliefs (Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Victori, 2004). In studies of language learners' beliefs, it is useful to combine different data collection methods in order to gain deeper insight into beliefs and to achieve triangulation (Sakui & Gaies, 1999).

The present study used a combination of data collection methods. These were an online questionnaire, an online discussion, and individual online interviews. The study

did not concentrate on the beliefs of groups of learners, which has been the focus of some research on LLLBs, but on individual learners' beliefs. Therefore, analysis of data gathered was used to present findings in the form of individual profiles of learners' beliefs and to cross-compare individual beliefs. Finally, data were compared with research findings about language learning success and LLLBs.

The present study contributes to the investigation of the beliefs of learners of Spanish as a foreign language in the context of higher education in Canada in particular. The study may also contribute to understanding what types of language learning beliefs these learners have, and the role those beliefs play in language learning. The study's in-depth and holistic exploration of self-identified successful language learners might also reveal what particular beliefs these learners hold which may relate to their success in language learning.

Statement of the Problem

Studies of learners' beliefs and attitudes provide "valuable sources of insight into language learning" (Christison & Krahne, 1986, p. 78). Ellis (1994) indicated that the study of learners' opinions about language learning is important, as "it is reasonable to assume that their 'philosophy' dictates their approach to learning" (p. 479). Some researchers have also argued that learners' language learning beliefs (LLLBs) relate to behaviour. For example, Gremmo and Riley (1995) explained that learners' beliefs and representations about language and language learning play a role in determining behaviour. These beliefs may "directly influence or even determine" learners' behaviour, attitude, or motivation (Riley, 1996, p. 155).

Beliefs have also been associated with proficiency and strategy use. For example, Tumposky (1991) indicated that “beliefs are related to proficiency through choice and use of strategies” (p. 51). Based on research emphasising the importance of motivation in language learning as a whole and in relation to strategies (e.g. Oxford & Nyikos, 1989), Tumposky provided a rationale for studying learner beliefs by arguing that “learner beliefs are a logical link between motivation and strategy use” (p. 51). Mori (1999) identified the need for research that can further account for learners’ differences and suggested a greater focus on learners’ beliefs: “Reasonable explanations may be found in insights into students’ perceptions. Therefore, the examination of beliefs about learning in general and language learning in particular plays a crucial role in accounting for individual differences” (p. 405).

The relationship between beliefs and behaviour has led researchers to investigate the link between LLLBs and success and proficiency in language learning. This research provides insight into successful and unsuccessful learners or more proficient and less proficient learners and what may differentiate them. In a study of learner variables and proficiency ratings, Ehrman and Oxford (1995) found a correlation between learners’ beliefs in their ability to learn languages and proficiency in speaking and reading. Samimy and Lee (1997) correlated learner beliefs with final course grades and found that learners with higher grades were more confident in their ability to learn foreign languages and more willing to practice with native speakers. Peacock (1999) found that less proficient and more proficient learners reported different language learning beliefs.

Researchers have also noted that it is important to consider learner aspects such as self-efficacy beliefs and attributions for success and failure in second- and foreign-

language learning. It has even been argued that self-efficacy and attributions in language learning may be very different from other areas of learning and may influence achievement differently (Hsieh, 2004). These and other concepts from cognitive psychology can provide further insight into language learning motivation (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Oxford, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). For example, Graham (2003) conducted a study of foreign language learners' beliefs which found factors that may affect learners' motivation for learning foreign languages. The study found that low self-efficacy levels affect motivation, and that attributing success to external factors while attributing failure to external ones or to internal and unchangeable qualities also affects motivation.

Using constructs from cognitive psychology, some studies of language learners provide specific insight into the different perceptions of learners who have attained varying levels of proficiency. In a study of school learners of French, Williams, Burden, and Lanvers (2002) reported differences in perceptions among groups at the extreme levels of proficiency with regard to their "sense of agency" (p. 524). Learners with higher proficiency were more able to identify the reasons for their successes and failures, perceived their success as being related to the amount of effort devoted to their studies, and were more intrinsically motivated. Williams and Burden (1997) indicated that the study of language learners' attributions for success and failure was a promising research area, but, as Graham (2003) noted more recently, there is still little research in foreign languages in relation to attribution theory or self-efficacy beliefs.

Some studies have specifically provided insight into the differences between successful and unsuccessful learners in terms of their beliefs, approaches to language

learning, use of learning strategies, and motivational aspects. However, often success is defined in terms of final course grades or achievement in proficiency or aptitude tests (e.g. Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Samimy & Lee, 1997; Victori, 1999). Rarely are there variations on the use of grades for reference to language learning success. One illustration of the use of alternative success measures is provided by Peacock's (1999) study of learners' beliefs, in which learners' proficiency self-ratings were used alongside proficiency tests. Another one is Hsieh's (2004) study which used questionnaires including self-report measures in which participants were asked, for example, to rate their satisfaction with their grade in a previous test and the degree to which they believed it was due to ability, effort, difficulty of the task, and luck, and to judge whether they would score a particular score on their next test. However, no other literature on learners' beliefs was uncovered in the review conducted for this study in which learners themselves identified or rated their success as language learners. Allowing learners to self-identify themselves as successful would represent an alternative approach to the identification of successful learners based on grades.

Furthermore, some studies of LLLBs have used closed-item questionnaires to elicit beliefs. This approach may not always provide an in-depth view of learners' beliefs, as responses are limited to the items covered in the questionnaire (Bernat, 2006; Sakui & Gaies, 1999). Relying on questionnaires may not reveal, for example, why learners have particular beliefs and how these beliefs actually relate to their success. Additionally, findings in those studies have been usually reported as group measures. Attention to the beliefs of individuals, however, may provide different or additional insights into learners'

beliefs. Cotterall (1999) suggested that research could “explore whether ‘profiles’ of learner beliefs can be identified” (p. 510).

In the Canadian context, where both English and French are official languages, there has been extensive research on the attitudes of Anglophone learners of French as a second language using the socio-educational model of second language acquisition (SLA) (see Gardner, 1985). This model establishes an indirect relationship between attitudes and second language acquisition. Attitudes affect motivation, which, in turn, affects SLA (Larser-Freeman, 1991). However, it has been suggested that Gardner’s model may not apply in the same way in foreign language learning contexts as in second language learning contexts. For example, in a foreign language setting, Dörnyei (1990) found that “affective predispositions toward the target language community are unlikely to explain a great proportion of the variance in language attainment” (p. 49). While the use of Gardner’s (see Gardner 1985, 2001a) model has contributed to an understanding of the process of second language acquisition, particularly of French as a second language, it appears that less research has comparatively been conducted on the beliefs of learners of other foreign languages in the Canadian context.

In summary, research on LLLBs and success has not been based on alternative means of qualifying success, such as allowing learners to self-identify themselves as successful. Secondly, there are concepts and theories, such as self-efficacy in language learning, which have not been investigated extensively and in a variety of settings in relation to language learning success and beliefs. Much of the research on LLLBs has relied on use of closed-ended questionnaires. While there have been some studies using interviews, generally alternative approaches to investigating LLLBs do not appear to have

been adopted. The focus in the literature on LLLBs and success using questionnaires has privileged the reporting of group measures. Few attempts have been made to profile the language learning beliefs of successful language learners. Finally, in Canada, although there has been some research linking LLLBs and success, the studies have focused more on French than other languages such as Spanish.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the beliefs of self-identified successful language learners of Spanish at a Canadian university. Rather than focusing on factors such as grades in order to characterise success, in this study participants identified themselves as successful learners of Spanish. This study also presents a conceptual framework within which the beliefs can be discussed, so as to take into account constructs such as self-efficacy. The data collection techniques reflect an innovative and alternative approach. In addition to administration of an online questionnaire including both closed and open-ended items, the study included an online discussion and individual online interviews in order to provide an in-depth and holistic perspective that questionnaires alone may not provide. The study presents individual profiles of language learning beliefs of self-identified successful learners as well as cross-case analysis of beliefs. Finally, the study focuses, not on French, but on Spanish as a foreign language in a Canadian context.

Overview of Methods

Researchers in second- and foreign- language learning have argued that gaining insight into learner beliefs is a complicated task, as it may be difficult to get at learners' beliefs. Pajares (1992) noted that, as a general construct, belief poses challenges for

empirical investigation. In order to discuss the difficulty of investigating beliefs, Pajares drew on Rokeach (1968), who argued that an understanding of beliefs requires making inferences from statements, intentions, and actions, and that individuals may be not able or willing to represent their beliefs accurately. Beliefs “cannot be directly observed or measured but must be inferred from what people say, intend, or do” (Pajares, 1992, p. 314). This statement points to methodological issues in eliciting learners’ beliefs. In studies of beliefs about language learning, one common approach has been to rely exclusively on questionnaires to elicit LLLBs, but this approach may not provide an accurate picture of learners’ beliefs (Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Victori, 2004). It has been argued that studies of language learners’ beliefs need to combine different data collection methods to provide a deeper understanding of beliefs and to achieve triangulation (Sakui & Gaies, 1999).

Some of the research on LLLBs has elicited beliefs by means of closed-item questionnaires, such as the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (Horwitz, 1988), which has been used with second- and foreign- language learners. This method of exploring LLLBs presents shortcomings, in that it may not always provide an in-depth profile of learners’ beliefs, for example it may not reveal why they have those beliefs and how these beliefs actually relate to each other. Sakui and Gaies (1999) pointed to the limitations of questionnaires in understanding learners’ language learning beliefs and favoured using interviews, as “questionnaires consisting of closed items allow respondents only to state their beliefs—and then only the beliefs which are included in the questionnaire” (p. 486).

Another drawback of studies of LLLBs using questionnaires is that findings are usually reported in terms of group measures, while attention to the beliefs of individuals may reveal intra-group differences and provide a different picture of learner beliefs. For example, Kern (1995) found that responses to the BALLI were markedly similar for two groups of language learners, but when considering individual responses it was revealed that “considerable individual variation exists within both groups” (p. 76). Similarly, in the conclusion of a study of learner beliefs about self-directed learning, Broady (1996) noted that “there may be distinct sets of beliefs held within the student group” (p. 224). In relation to the usefulness of paying attention to the language learning beliefs of individuals, Sakui and Gaies (1999) suggested that research could “explore whether ‘profiles’ of learner beliefs can be identified” (p. 486).

The present study used the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (Horwitz, 1988), which was administered online, combined with an online discussion and individual online interviews. The data gathered by these means were then used to create individual profiles of learners’ language learning beliefs in order to understand more in-depth and more holistically the beliefs of learners in the context of the study. Cross-case comparisons of the beliefs of participants were conducted. Data were also compared with the literature on language learning success and LLLBs.

Significance of the Study

Of special interest for researchers of LLLBs is how this type of research can ultimately inform the practices of second- and foreign- language instructors and educators. Findings about LLLBs might especially benefit instructors in furthering their

awareness of the variety of learners' beliefs. As expressed by Cotterall (1999), for example, instructors can be more aware of the range of learners' beliefs and learner types: "Investigation of the beliefs which inform different behaviours in the language classroom is useful in making teachers aware of different learner types that need to be accommodated" (p. 493). Additionally, understanding LLLBs can help inform instructors' development of language learning opportunities and promotion of certain language learning beliefs among learners. Identification of LLLBs and reflection on their potential impact on language learning and teaching in general, as well as in more specific areas such as the learners' expectations and strategies used, can inform future syllabus design and teacher practice.

The present study, focused on the beliefs of self-identified successful language learners, may contribute to understanding what types of language learning beliefs these learners have, and the role those beliefs play in language learning. The study also contributes to the investigation of the beliefs of learners of Spanish as a foreign language in the context of higher education in Canada in particular. The study's in-depth and holistic exploration of self-identified successful language learners might also reveal what particular beliefs these learners hold which may relate to their success in language learning.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the present study resides in the fact that the range of beliefs of successful language learners explored is limited to the beliefs of eight learners in the particular context of the study. Similarly, only one target language is considered.

Additionally, the study is circumscribed to language learning beliefs, and does not include beliefs about learning in other domains or beliefs about learning in general.

Another limitation may be related to the fact that recruitment was based on self-identification of language learning success, which might have resulted in the group of participants tending to represent a particular type of self-confident foreign language learner. Additionally, the study required learners to participate online. Therefore, it may have been more appealing to those successful learners who were already technologically inclined rather than to other types of potential participants.

Finally, aspects of LLLBs different from those considered in this study may offer additional insights into beliefs. In this regard, some researchers have pointed out, for example, the variable nature of LLLBs (Kalaja, 1995; Sakui & Gaies, 1999) and their relationship with actions or behaviours (Barcelos, 2000). It was not in the scope of this study to examine LLLBs over time or to use observation in order to compare beliefs with actions or behaviours.

Definition of Beliefs

Pajares (1992) refers to the difficulty of defining beliefs, drawing attention to the fact that the study of beliefs in general is marked by “definitional problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures” (p. 307). He explains that, apart from the term “beliefs,” many other terms have been used, such as “attitudes, values, judgements, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles,

perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy” (p. 309). With regard to language learning beliefs in particular, Barcelos (2000) also notes the variety of terms used, such as “representations,” “metacognitive knowledge,” “learner representations,” “learners’ philosophy of language learning,” “cultural beliefs,” learning culture,” “culture of learning,” “the culture of learning languages,” and “folklinguistic theories of learning” (pp. 41-42). However, she views this variety in a positive view, as it denotes the recognition of LLLBs as an important area of study.

Another issue that has been discussed when conceptualising beliefs is how beliefs in general and language learning beliefs in particular relate to or differentiate themselves from other concepts such as attitudes, conceptions, knowledge, or metacognitive knowledge (see Barcelos, 2000; Benson & Lor, 1999; Dörnyei, 2005; Kalaja, 1995; Pajares, 1992). Although some researchers have distinguished beliefs from other concepts such as attitudes (see Dörnyei, 2005, Rokeach, 1968), the terms have often been used interchangeably (Barcelos, 2000). The present study did not distinguish between the two terms. Excluding attitudes in order to focus solely on beliefs, for example, might have limited insights gained from the study. Another issue that needs to be considered when conceptualising beliefs is that different approaches may emphasise different dimensions (e.g. cognitive, social, cultural) of language learning beliefs. For the purpose of this study, the definition of beliefs considered is consistent with Abraham and Vann’s (1987) argument that learners have “beliefs about how language operates, and consequently, how it is learned” (p. 95), which in their view constitute learners’ ‘philosophy’ of language learning.

Overview of the Study

Chapter one focuses on the importance of studying learners' language learning beliefs (LLBs) and the relationship between beliefs and language learning success. The chapter began with an introduction to the study. The remainder of the chapter explained the rationale for the study, provided its purpose, an overview of its methods, as well as its significance and limitations, and included a section on defining beliefs.

Chapter two reviews concepts and theoretical models which have been related to second- and foreign- language learning success in the literature as well as the main related research findings. It focuses on learners' language learning strategies, motivation and attitudes, the target language community and target language speakers, and psychological constructs applied to L2 learning, such as self-efficacy and attribution, self-determination, and self-concept.

Chapter three includes a literature review of research on LLBs. The review is organised around the different data collection methods that have been used to elicit information from learners about their language learning beliefs. The first section reviews studies that rely primarily on the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), used on its own or in conjunction with other methods. The second section focuses on research that uses other questionnaires. The third section discusses studies using interviews.

Chapter four describes the data collection methods used in the study to elicit LLBs and the rationale for their use. Case study design guided the investigation of LLBs. A combination of data collection methods was used. Data collection relied on the Beliefs

About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (Horwitz, 1988), which was administered online, as well as an online discussion and individual online interviews.

Chapter five presents the findings of the study in the form of individual profiles of learners' beliefs. Each participant's profile presents the questionnaire results and a descriptive in-depth profile of their beliefs.

Chapter six compares individual beliefs in order to identify commonalities as well as differences between beliefs. This cross-analysis is followed by a discussion of findings in relation to the concepts and theories outlined in Chapter two as well as in relation to the studies reviewed in Chapter three. The chapter is followed by conclusions as well as implications for the teaching of Spanish at the post-secondary level and suggestions for future research.

Summary

The claim that learners' beliefs may determine their language learning approach and behaviour has led researchers to investigate the link between LLLBs and success and proficiency in L2 learning. This research provides insight into more proficient and less proficient learners and what may differentiate them (e.g. Peacock, 1999; Samimy & Lee, 1997). Language learning beliefs have also been related to L2 success through a focus on motivation and language learning strategy use (Tumposky, 1991). Some recent studies also explore the relationships between self-efficacy and attribution and success in language learning (e.g. Graham, 2003; Hsieh, 2004; Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002).

Research on LLLBs and success has not been based on alternative means of qualifying success, such as allowing learners to self-identify themselves as successful.

There are concepts and theories, such as self-efficacy in language learning, which have not been investigated extensively and in a variety of settings in relation to language learning success and beliefs. Much of the research on LLLBs has relied on use of closed-ended questionnaires. Few attempts have been made to profile the language learning beliefs of successful language learners. In Canada, studies of LLLBs have focused more on French than other languages such as Spanish.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the beliefs of self-identified successful language learners of Spanish at a Canadian university. Participants in this study identified themselves as successful learners of Spanish. This study also presents a conceptual framework within which the beliefs can be discussed, so as to take into account constructs such as self-efficacy. The data collection techniques reflect an innovative and alternative approach. In addition to administration of an online questionnaire including both closed and open-ended items, the study included an online discussion and individual online interviews in order to provide an in-depth and holistic perspective that questionnaires alone may not provide. The study presents individual profiles of language learning beliefs of self-identified successful learners as well as cross-case analysis of beliefs. Finally, the study focuses, not on French, but on Spanish as a foreign language in a Canadian context.

The present study may contribute to understanding what types of language learning beliefs these learners have, and the role those beliefs play in language learning. This type of research can ultimately inform the practices of L2 language instructors and educators. The study also contributes to the investigation of the beliefs of learners of Spanish as a foreign language in the context of higher education in Canada in particular. The study's

in-depth and holistic exploration of self-identified successful language learners might also reveal what particular beliefs these learners hold which may relate to their success in language learning.

CHAPTER TWO

Conceptual Framework: Success in Language Learning

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the various concepts which have been discussed in relation to success in second- and foreign- language learning (L2). The focus will be on learners' language learning strategies, learner motivation and attitudes, the target language community and target language speakers, and psychological constructs recently applied to L2 learning, such as self-efficacy and attribution, self-determination, and self-concept. The review includes several theoretical models which have been developed to investigate the relationships between learner differences and success or achievement in L2 learning.

Language Learning Strategies

Success in language learning has been investigated through a focus on learners' language learning strategy use. This type of research originated with the concept of the "good language learner." Studies on this type of learner tended to focus on the strategies and approaches of individual language learners (e.g. Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975). Success in language learning was approached from the perspective of learners' behaviours and individual differences. This research was concerned with looking at individual learners who had succeeded in learning foreign or second languages in order to identify their characteristics and the language learning

behaviours they exhibited. As exemplified by the focus of one of these early studies, research on good language learners was guided by questions such as “do good language learners tackle the language learning task differently from poor learners?” and “do learners have certain characteristics that predispose them to good or poor learning?” (Naiman et al., 1978, p. 2). Studies of the good language learner pointed to the importance of language learning strategies, and derived into a more detailed study of language learning strategies. Subsequent research identified and listed strategies and factors related to strategy choice (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Numerous studies about language learning strategies were conducted and lists of strategies compiled (e.g. Oxford, 1989, 1994, 1990, 2001; Ramirez, 1986; Reiss, 1985; Stern, 1975).

One of the initial reasons for a focus on strategies was the rationale that poorer learners may benefit from the strategies used by good language learners (see Naiman et al., 1978). A body of work within L2 learning strategies has provided insights into the use of strategies on the part of good and weaker learners. One of the characteristics of good language learners is conscious use of language learning strategies and planning of implementation of strategies (see Bialystok, 1981; Cohen, 1987; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1990; Wenden, 1985). In a review of research on language learning strategies conducted by Oxford and Crookall (1989), three of their conclusions specifically referred to findings on strategy use and successful or proficient language learners as follows:

More proficient learners appear to use a wider range of strategies in a greater number of situations, but the relationship between strategy use and proficiency is complex; Many different strategies can be used by good learners...; Students at

higher course levels tend to use strategies somewhat differently from students at lower level courses. (p. 413-414)

Oxford's (1994) summary of findings on the effectiveness of learner use of L2 learning strategies also provides insight into successful language learners: the use of L2 learning strategies in a conscious and tailored fashion relates to language proficiency; successful language learners select strategies that work well together in an orchestrated way and tailor them to task requirements; and they can identify the strategies they use and explain why they use them.

The relationship between strategy use and proficiency is a complex one (Oxford & Crookall, 1989). The number, type, and effectiveness of language learning strategies that learners use can be affected by factors such as learner motivation and learner attitudes and beliefs (Oxford, 1994). Some researchers have focused on other learner characteristics apart from language learning strategy use which account for success in language learning, such as motivation and beliefs/attitudes. While research on the good or successful language learner has been linked to L2 learning strategies, another way in which the investigation of success in language learning can be approached to gain insights into learning differences, as Mori (1999) argues, is from the perspective of learners' language learning beliefs:

An examination of learning strategies per se does not address why certain strategies are used by some learners but not by others. Reasonable explanations may be found in insights into students' perceptions. Therefore, the examination of beliefs about learning in general and language learning in particular plays a crucial role in accounting for individual differences. (p. 405)

Motivation and Attitudes

Success in language learning has been explored, not only through a focus on language learning strategies, but also through a focus on learner motivation and beliefs/attitudes and their relationship with language achievement. Two factors identified in early research as determining proficiency in French among Anglophone students in Canada were aptitude and a constellation of attitudes towards French Canadians (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). In subsequent research, a relationship was established between learner attitudes and success in language learning through motivation (see Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Language achievement correlated with motivation, which was affected by learner attitudes.

This type of research evolved into the formulation of a theoretical model for language learning, the socio-educational model of second language acquisition (SLA) (see Gardner, 1985; 1988; 2000; 2001a; 2001b; 2005), which focuses on the role of attitudes and motivation in L2 learning. In this model, motivation and ability are directly linked to language achievement. Motivation is influenced by attitudes toward the learning situation and integrativeness, and in some contexts by instrumentality. Integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situation, on the one hand, and integrativeness and instrumentality, on the other, are positively correlated. The model also posits that language anxiety and achievement affect each other (see Gardner, 2005). Integrative motivation is a further construct which subsumes integrativeness, attitudes towards the learning situation, and motivation. Integrative motivation is a predictor of language learning achievement (e.g. Gardner, 1979; Gardner & Lambert, 1959). The

Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) includes measures for aspects of the constructs in Gardner's model (see Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Smythe, 1981).

Research based on the socio-educational model of SLA turned attention towards the role of motivation in L2 learning, whereas language learning was previously considered to be determined by intelligence and verbal ability (Gardner, 2001b). That research focused on three major elements of motivation as predictors of achievement: effort; the desire to learn the language; and attitudes toward learning the language. A motivated learner has been described as someone who is goal-directed; expends effort; is persistent; is attentive; has desires (wants); exhibits positive affect; is aroused; has expectancies; demonstrates self-confidence (self-efficacy); and has reasons (motives) (Gardner, 2005). In the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), three measures correspond to motivation: Motivational Intensity; Desire to Learn the Language; and Attitudes toward Learning the Language.

Some constructs related to motivation in the socio-educational model which have received much attention are instrumentality and integrativeness (see Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972). At the same time, the distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation, their definition, and their effect on language learning have been the object of much debate (see Gardner, 2005). Instrumentality and integrativeness do not exclude each other. Instrumentality relates to conditions where a language is studied for practical purposes, such as for employment or passing examinations. Integrativeness refers to an individual's "openness to taking on characteristics of another cultural/linguistic group" (Gardner, 2005, p. 10). It reflects "an openness to other cultures in general, and an interest in the target culture in particular" (p. 10). It also represents "a socially relevant...

affective construct” (p. 11) and “group-focussed affective reactions” (p. 10). As Gardner explains, individuals with an interest in other language communities, or an appreciation and interest in other language groups are more open to learning a second language. Integrativeness distinguishes the learning of second languages from learning other school subjects. It also represents “a socially relevant, as opposed to an educationally relevant affective construct” (p. 11). In the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), three measures relate to integrativeness: Integrative Orientation; Attitudes toward the Target Group; and Interest in Foreign Language.

The Target Language Community and Target Language Speakers

The socio-educational model of SLA focuses on the role of learners’ attitudes towards the target language community in language learning. In this regard, MacIntyre (2004) emphasized the contribution of this model in “articulat[ing] the impact of larger social forces such as intergroup attitudes, cultural identification, and familial influence, on the language learning process” (¶3). Research subsequent to the formulation of this socially-grounded model has concentrated in more detail on sociocultural aspects of language learning by investigating learners’ attitudes towards and experiences with the target language, culture and target language speakers. Researchers have focused, for example, on the role of early sociocultural experiences and attitudes in relation to the L2 and L2 speakers using the socio-educational model of SLA. As an illustration, Gardner, Masgoret, and Tremblay (1999) investigated how a variety of experiences and attitudes (e.g. parental encouragement; motivational intensity; French class anxiety; and learner attitudes towards French courses and teachers) influenced learners’ present attitudes to

learning the language and to its speakers as well as learners' self-perception of proficiency.

Other models have also examined sociocultural aspects of language learning by focusing on learners' contacts, experiences, and concepts of themselves with respect to the target language and its community (e.g. Clément, 1980; Csizér & Dörnyey, 2005). These models offer insights into the relationship between learners' contact with the target culture, target language speakers and aspects of motivation and language achievement. The social context model (Clément, 1980) is one of these models paying attention to the social component of L2 learning with a particular focus on settings where different linguistic communities co-exist.

The social context model considers social variables (e.g. ethnolinguistic vitality), language identity, self-confidence, attitudinal factors, and processes of acquisition of the L2 and acculturation (see Clément & Gardner, 2001). It highlights self-confidence (see Clément, Gardner, & Smythe, 1977) as a key component of L2 learning which affects motivation and, in turn, language achievement. Additionally, self-confidence is relevant, not only in settings with different language communities, but also in unicultural contexts where there may be little direct contact with L2 speakers (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994).

Testing of the social context model has indicated that learners' amount and quality of contact with the target language community influences self-confidence with the language (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983). Self-confidence affects learners' motivation to learn and use the language of the other community; future desire for intercultural communication with the target language community; as well as the extent of

identification with that community (see Clément & Kruidenier, 1985). Additionally, the amount of French that learners experience influences their willingness to communicate, frequency of communication, and perceived competence in French (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

Motivational Constructs

Defining the precise nature of the relationship between different learner factors or variables, such as learner beliefs, and their relation to success in language learning is complicated. For example, with regard to studies on the relationships between attitudes, integrative and instrumental motivation, and success, Larser-Freeman (1991) noted: “Different researchers have reached different conclusions about hypothesized correlations depending upon the learner context; perhaps the only reliable finding is that the intensity of the motivation is more important than the type” (Social-Psychological Factors Attitude and Motivation section, ¶1). Establishing the relationships among the different factors affecting language learning success is complicated by the fact that some of the constructs may not directly affect language learning; for example, motivation only indirectly influences language learning achievement (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). As Csizér and Dörnyei explain, “motivation is a concept that explains why people behave as they do rather than how successful their behavior will be” (p. 20). Research in motivation and attitudes/beliefs in the last few years has explored new avenues to gain further insights into success in language learning. Recent research has focused on using motivational constructs derived from psychology that focus on learners’ language learning beliefs.

These models emphasise aspects of learners' beliefs, such as their perceptions of themselves as language learners and perceptions of their L2 competence.

Motivation constructs that focus on learner beliefs have been applied to research on L2 learning. The use of psychological theories and constructs in research on L2 learning may help to better understand the link between learners' language learning beliefs and success in L2 learning. Since the 1990s, three types of motivation theories have been adopted: expectancy-value; self-determination; and goal theories (Dörnyei, 1998). This section will describe some of these approaches which have been applied to research on language learner beliefs focusing on the insights they provide into learners' beliefs and success.

Self-efficacy and Attribution

Self-efficacy and attribution theories have attracted the attention of researchers of language learning. Bandura (1986) described self-efficacy as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 391). Self-efficacy influences learners' choice of activity, the effort they expend in it, and their persistence in the face of difficulty. Bandura (1991) argued that the greater learners' self-efficacy to do a task, the greater their motivation to do the task. Attribution refers to perceived causes of behaviours or events (see Heider, 1958; Rotter, 1966). Weiner et al. (1971) conceptualized attribution as consisting of three dimensions that influence a person's decision to continue or discontinue with a task, as well as their assessment of themselves when faced with tasks. Those dimensions were: locus; stability; and control. Locus refers to whether the person perceives the cause of an

event as internal (e.g. personal effort) or external (e.g. luck). Stability refers to whether the cause of an event is stable or unstable across time and events. Control refers to how much control an individual has over a cause.

Self-efficacy and attribution theories are particularly relevant in the context of post-secondary learning, as self-efficacy and attribution beliefs affect learners' motivation and goals for academic work in that context (Stage, Muller, Kinzie, & Simmons, 1998). How these theories relate to second- and foreign- language learning is not clear, however, as little research has been done in this area (Graham, 2003; Hsieh, 2004). What is known in relation to language learning is that self-efficacy and attribution beliefs relate to motivation and proficiency and that these beliefs differ in more proficient and less proficient learners. For example, Williams, Burden, and Lanvers (2002) highlighted differences in perceptions among groups of French school students at the extreme levels of proficiency with regard to their "sense of agency" (p. 524). Learners with higher proficiency were more able to identify the reasons for their successes and failures, perceived their success as being related to the amount of effort devoted to their studies, and were more intrinsically motivated, reporting that they enjoyed learning languages and were willing to learn them even if this was not required. Low self-efficacy levels as well as attribution styles in which success is attributed to external factors and failure to external factors or to internal, unchangeable qualities may affect secondary learners' motivation for learning foreign languages (Graham, 2003).

Findings in the literature on self-efficacy and attribution indicate that students with the highest expectancies for success and the highest self-efficacy attribute their success to stable, dependable factors (e.g. high ability) and show higher achievement in turn (Hsieh,

2004). In a post-secondary context, learners who made internal, stable, and personal attributions for language learning success had higher self-efficacy than learners who made external attributions, and higher achievement also related to internal attributions (Hsieh, 2004).

Self-determination

In addition to self-efficacy and attribution, the concept of self-determination has also been applied to research on language learning. Noels and associates (see Noels, 2001a; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 2001; Noels, Clément, Pelletier, & Vallerand, 2000) combined motivation constructs from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) with those in Gardner's and Clément's models to develop a model of motivation in L2.

According to self-determination theory, an individual's reason for performing an activity can be understood in terms of the extent to which it is perceived as freely chosen and endorsed by the self. Motivational orientations can be arranged along a continuum of intrinsic (i.e. more self-determined) and extrinsic (i.e. less self-determined; more externally controlled) motivation behaviours. The most self-determined orientations are related to the most positive consequences (see Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand, 1997). Testing of the model has indicated that self-determined learners are less likely to feel anxious or to give up studying the language (Noels, 2001a). Additionally, intrinsic motivation correlates positively with persistence in L2 learning and with final course grades (Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 2001). In a summary of findings on self-determination theory and language learning, McIntosh and Noels (2004) noted that the more self-determined orientations predict attitudes toward learning the L2, self-reported

effort (i.e., motivational intensity), intentions to continue language study, and self-rated competence, whereas the less self-determined orientations are more weakly associated with those variables.

A more recent model of motivation in language learning developed by Noels (see Noels, 2001a, 2001b) consists of intrinsic reasons, extrinsic reasons, and integrative reasons in language learning. Intrinsic reasons encompass concepts such as enjoyment, aesthetic appreciation, challenge, engagement, and enhancement of language learning competence. Extrinsic reasons vary along a continuum of more and less self-determined forms of motivation. These can be externally imposed norms or internalized norms. What Gardner calls integrative orientation would belong in extrinsic reasons for learning a language. Integrative reasons are related to positive contacts with the target language group, and might result in identification with that group.

Self-Concept

A relevant aspect of the psychological theories applied to language learning is that they place emphasis on self-concept. As an illustration, two models that pay special attention to this concept are MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels' (1998) model based on "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC) and Csizér and Dörnyei's (2005) model applying theory of the self to language learning (see also Dörnyei, 2005). MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) developed a pyramid model based on McCroskey and Baer's (1985) concept of "Willingness to Communicate (WTC)" to language learning, defined as the probability of initiating communication, given the opportunity.

The model encompasses social processes of interpersonal and intergroup contact, the educational process of language learning, and communicative processes (MacIntyre, 2004). It integrates motivational processes with communication competencies and with perceived self-confidence. It focuses on “what might be the critical decision for language learning success,” whether a learner “choose[s] to communicate when the opportunity arises” (¶5). Two variables, communication apprehension and perceived competence, affect WTC.

Csizer and Dörnyei (2005) have elaborated on motivation in L2 learning from a psychological perspective, the theory of the self, to describe the L2 motivational self. Applied to language learning, the theory focuses on individuals’ concepts of themselves as language learners. The authors have proposed replacing the term “integrativeness” by the term “Ideal L2 self” and interpreting integrativeness broadly. In this conception of the Ideal L2 self, learners have an integrative disposition if their ideal self is associated with L2 mastery. From this perspective, motivation is “the desire to achieve one’s ideal language self by reducing the discrepancy between one’s actual and ideal selves” (p. 30).

Summary

This chapter reviewed the various concepts which have been related to second- and foreign- language learning (L2) success in the literature. Success in language learning has been investigated through a focus on learners’ language learning strategy use. Numerous studies about language learning strategies have been conducted and provided insights into the use of strategies on the part of good and weaker learners. Findings on the effectiveness of learner use of L2 learning strategies indicate that L2 language

proficiency relates to the use of strategies in a conscious and tailored fashion; successful language learners select strategies that work well together in an orchestrated way and tailor them to task requirements; and they can identify the strategies they use and explain why they use them. However, the relationship between strategy use and proficiency is complicated, as strategies can be affected by factors such as learner motivation and learner attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, some researchers have focused on other learner characteristics which account for success in language learning.

Success in language learning has also been explored through a focus on motivation and attitudes in L2 learning and their relationship with language achievement in the socio-educational model of second language acquisition (SLA). The constructs of instrumentality and integrativeness in the model have received particular attention. One of the contributions of the socio-educational model is its focus on learners' attitudes in relation to the target language community and speakers. Other models such as Clément's social context model have placed these types of sociocultural aspects of language learning at their core. The model pays attention to the social component of L2 learning with a particular focus on settings where different linguistic communities co-exist. It considers social variables (e.g. ethnolinguistic vitality), language identity, self-confidence, attitudinal factors, and processes of acquisition of the L2 and acculturation. In the model, self-confidence is a key component of L2 learning which affects motivation and, in turn, language achievement.

Recent research in L2 learning has focused on using motivational constructs derived from psychology to gain insights into success in language learning. These constructs often emphasise aspects of learners' beliefs, such as their perceptions of themselves as

language learners and perceptions of their L2 competence. Some of those constructs are self-efficacy and attribution, self-determination, and self-concept. Self-efficacy and attribution theories have recently attracted the attention of researchers on language learning. Although relatively little research has been conducted using these theories in L2 learning, findings indicate that self-efficacy and attribution beliefs relate to motivation and proficiency and those beliefs differ in more proficient and less proficient learners.

Self-determination focuses on motivational orientations as intrinsic (i.e. more self-determined) and extrinsic (i.e. less self-determined; more externally controlled). The more self-determined orientations predict attitudes toward learning the L2, self-reported effort (i.e., motivational intensity), intentions to continue language study, and self-rated competence, whereas the less self-determined orientations are more weakly associated with those variables. A model of motivation developed by Noels has proposed conceptualising motivation in language learning in terms of intrinsic, extrinsic, and integrative reasons in language learning.

The psychological theories applied to language learning also focus on self-concept. For example, the “Willingness to Communicate” (WTC) model integrates motivational processes with communication competencies and with perceived self-confidence. The model of the L2 motivational self focuses on individuals’ concepts of themselves as language learners, whereby learners have an integrative disposition if their ideal self is associated with L2 mastery.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will review a selection of studies that have explored the language learning beliefs of foreign- and second- language learners in varied contexts. Two criteria were used to select the literature in this review. Firstly, studies from the 1980s to 2006 were included to provide an overview of the diversity of research conducted into learners' language learning beliefs (LLBs). In this regard, one purpose of the review is to explore this diversity primarily in terms of the different data collection methods used in research on LLBs, as well as in terms of the different purposes in conducting this type of research and the diverse language learning contexts studied. Secondly, the studies chosen for review are similar to the present study in terms of the data collection methods, the purpose, or learners' target language. In this regard, the review includes research on LLBs conducted using data collection methods such as questionnaires and interviews. Special attention is placed on the use of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI, as well as in the use of interviews to elicit learners' beliefs, since those were the data collection methods used in the present study.

The literature review on learners' language learning beliefs in this chapter is divided into three sections, corresponding to the use of different data collection methods. The organization of the review around data collection methods, however, is not meant to classify studies into clear-cut categories, a task which is complicated by the fact that different data collection methods are often combined in one study. The first section of the

review discusses studies that rely primarily on the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) to explore language learning beliefs, either used on its own or in conjunction with other data collection methods. The second section focuses on research that has developed and used questionnaires in ways different from the BALLI in order to explore LLLBs. The third section discusses studies that use interviews to elicit information from learners about their language learning beliefs.

Overview of the Diversity of Research into Learners' Language Learning Beliefs

The methods used to collect data on LLLBs have been varied and have included questionnaires and interviews. One common approach relies on the development and use of questionnaires consisting of a series of statements indicating beliefs about language learning. These may be closed-item questionnaires in which learners are required to agree or disagree with each statement. One example of this type of questionnaire is the BALLI, or Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (see Horwitz, 1988). Subsequent studies have replicated Horwitz's original study of LLLBs, adapted the Inventory, and combined it with other methods of data collection (e.g. Banya & Cheng, 1997; Cohen & Fass, 2001; Lassiter, 2003; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Yang, 1999). Researchers have also developed other types of questionnaires to explore LLLBs (e.g. Cotterall, 1995, 1999; Mori, 1999; Sakui & Gaies, 1999). Another approach to the study of learners' beliefs about language learning typically relies on use of interviews and inductively explores learners' beliefs (e.g. Alfa, 2004; Benson & Lor, 1999; Wenden, 1987). In terms of the purposes of research on LLLBs, it is necessary to consider that, while some studies focus on beliefs alone, other studies explore the relationship between language learning beliefs

and other variables such as cultural background (e.g. Horwitz, 1999; McCargar, 1993; Tumposky, 1991), performance (e.g. Peacock, 1999; Samimy & Lee, 1997), anxiety (e.g. Coulombe, 2000; Truitt, 1995), strategy use (e.g. Yang, 1992; 1999), and gender (Bacon & Finneman, 1992). Finally, it is also worth noting that research on LLLBs has tended to focus on university and adult language learners (Sakui & Gaies, 1999).

Studies of various types have used the BALLI or adapted versions of the BALLI to describe and assess language learning beliefs. These studies have been conducted in varied settings, in terms of learning context (foreign- and second- language learning), target language, and learners' proficiency level. They have concentrated on the beliefs of groups of learners, of instructors and, less frequently, of teacher trainees. Lines of enquiry on language learning beliefs using the BALLI or adapted versions of it are diverse. Some studies focus exclusively on the beliefs of learners (e.g. Horwitz, 1988; Lassiter, 2003; Mantle-Bromley, 1995). Other studies, however, focus solely on instructors (e.g. Horwitz, 1985; Peacock, 2001; Shimizu & Green, 2002).

Some of the studies are designed, not only to describe the beliefs of one particular group of learners or instructors, but also to find similarities and differences across groups. These comparative studies may totally or partially focus on comparing the beliefs of different groups of learners (e.g. Banya & Chen, 1997; Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Kuntz, 1997; Tumposky, 1991), or on comparing the beliefs of learners with the beliefs of instructors (e.g. Banya & Chen, 1997; Kern, 1995; Kuntz, 1997; Peacock, 1999; Samimy & Lee, 1997). The purpose of these studies is to explore, describe, and assess the language learning beliefs of learners and instructors, reveal learners' misconceptions about language learning, and reveal mismatches in the language learning beliefs of

learners and their instructors. The purpose may be to investigate learners' beliefs in an unexplored context (e.g. Bernat, 2004). Other studies specifically address the relationship between learner beliefs about language learning and learner variables such as cultural background (e.g. Horwitz, 1999; McCargar, 1993; Tumposky, 1991), performance (e.g. Peacock, 1999; Samimy & Lee, 1997), anxiety (e.g. Truitt, 1995), and strategy use (e.g. Yang, 1992; 1999).

Studies Using the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)

The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) is a widely known questionnaire for studying language learning beliefs (Victori, 2004). It has been used to explore foreign- and second- language learners' and instructors' beliefs about language learning. The BALLI was developed and tested by Horwitz (see Horwitz, 1985, 1987, 1988). The development of the BALLI involved eliciting information through interviews from foreign and ESL learners and instructors, as well as from educators from different cultural backgrounds. In these consultations, learners and instructors were asked to identify their beliefs about language learning as well as other people's beliefs, and instructors were also asked to identify the beliefs of current or former learners. Frequently occurring interview comments were then used to develop the questionnaire items. The data gathered were used to develop three inventories, two for use with American foreign language learners (Horwitz, 1988) and with ESL learners (Horwitz, 1987), and another one for use with foreign language instructors (Horwitz, 1985).

The original questionnaire for use with learners designed by Horwitz (1988) consists of 34 items on a five-item Likert scale which survey language learners' opinions on foreign language learning regarding five dimensions:

1. The difficulty of language learning (Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 14, 24, 28);
2. Foreign language aptitude (Items 1, 2, 10, 15, 22, 29, 32, 33, 34);
3. The nature of language learning (Items 8, 11, 16, 20, 25, 26);
4. Learning and communication strategies (Items 7, 9, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21); and
5. Motivations and expectations (Items 23, 27, 30, 31).

Horwitz (1988) first tested this Inventory for use with learners in a seminal study in which she surveyed the language learning beliefs of first-semester university learners at the University of Texas. Participants were 98 Spanish learners, 63 French learners, and 80 German learners. The purpose of the study was to describe learners' beliefs about language learning and explain how learner expectations and strategies may be influenced by those beliefs.

The study found similar responses across all groups for a range of items in the five different areas of the BALLI. For the purpose of this review, some representative findings and their implications as outlined by Horwitz will be highlighted. In the area of the difficulty of language learning, for example, results for Item 14, regarding the time necessary to become fluent in a language, revealed that more than 40% of learners in each group considered that, by spending one hour a day learning a foreign language, a maximum of two years was needed to become fluent. In the area of foreign language aptitude, responses to Items 2, 15, and 34 indicated that, while more than 60% of learners in each group agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that some people "are born with a

special ability” for foreign language learning, more than 70% also thought that everyone can learn to speak a foreign language. In contrast, the group percentages for agreement or strong agreement with the statement “I have foreign language aptitude” were only between 32% and 41%. According to Horwitz (1988), these types of responses pointed to beliefs that can make learners have low expectations of their ability as language learners and become frustrated when their progress is slower than expected.

Regarding the dimension of beliefs related to the nature of language learning, more than 25% of learners in each group agreed or strongly agreed with items indicating that learning a foreign language is mostly learning vocabulary and grammatical rules (Items 16 and 20), and more than 60% of the Spanish and German learners answered likewise when asked whether language learning is mostly a matter of translating from English (Item 26). As Horwitz (1988) indicated, these findings have implications for how learners’ beliefs can affect their strategies. As a result of these types of beliefs, learners might focus mainly on memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules, which can hinder their development of communicative competence.

Regarding learning strategies, responses to the items related to communication strategies were mixed. Learners agreed with the statements “It’s o.k. to guess if you don’t know a word in the foreign language” (Item 13), and “You shouldn’t say anything in the foreign language until you can say it correctly” (Item 9). However, they disagreed with the statements “If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on” (Item 19), and “I feel self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other people” (Item 18). As Horwitz (1988) indicated in relation to these responses, mismatches in the expectations of instructors using communicative

approaches and learners can result in “lack of student confidence and satisfaction with the language class” (p. 290). Therefore, it is important to assist learners in understanding the rationale of activities in the language classroom. Learners’ responses in the study revealed language learner beliefs that can influence expectations and strategies. Horwitz (1988) concluded that instructors need to be aware of learners’ beliefs in order to gain insight into the ways they can promote effective learning strategies.

Kern (1995) compared the beliefs of 288 first and second semester learners enrolled in French courses at the University of California, Berkeley, with the beliefs of their instructors. Kern also compared learners’ beliefs in his study with the beliefs of first-year Spanish, French, and German learners at the University of Texas in Horwitz’s (1988) study. Kern’s study was different from previous studies in that it included a temporal dimension in the exploration of beliefs by administering the BALLI twice over the course of one semester. Results differed depending on whether they were reported at the group level, as is the tradition with studies using the BALLI, or at the individual level.

When comparing the two groups of learners as a whole, there were strong similarities in language learning beliefs. The only significant difference in the beliefs of the two groups as a whole were in responses that revealed that the beliefs of learners at the University of California were more in tune with communicative approaches. Although responses were markedly similar for the two groups from an overall perspective, Kern noted that “considerable individual variation exists within both groups” (p. 76). Similarly, when reporting on responses for the first and second administration of the questionnaire, results also differed when considering measures globally and on an individual level. From a global perspective, little change was found in learners’ beliefs

over the course of one semester. However, responses on an individual level when considering all items revealed that 52% of learner responses shifted. Like Horwitz (1988), Kern insisted in his conclusion on the importance of instructors being aware of learners' expectations and attitudes.

Mantle-Bromley (1995) used the BALLI in a study that focused on school learners' attitudes towards foreign language learning in order to examine whether they already approached language learning with unfavourable beliefs. Her study differed from other studies using the BALLI in that it explored the language learning beliefs of younger learners. The study used a modified version of the instrument to explore the beliefs of 135 American middle-school-aged students studying Spanish and French in Kansas. In the dimension of the difficulty of language learning, 23% of learners believed Spanish was easy or very easy to learn, and 69% believed they could learn a foreign language in two years or less.

With respect to learners' beliefs about language aptitude, 46% believed some people have a special language learning ability, 51% thought they could learn to speak another language well, while only 26% considered that they had that ability. With regard to learners' beliefs about learning and communication strategies, 23% thought that they should not speak the language until they could speak it correctly, and 37% reported feeling self-conscious when speaking the foreign language in front of others. Finally, responses in all items associated with the nature of language learning also revealed misconceptions. As in other studies using the BALLI, Mantle-Bromley concluded that the learners in her study "apparently entered the language class with mistaken beliefs about the skills and knowledge necessary for them to succeed" (p. 381).

The BALLI has also been used in studies researching language learner beliefs in relation to different learner variables. One of the variables studied is learners' proficiency. Peacock's (1999) study empirically tested the association between learner beliefs and proficiency in the context of EFL learning in a study with 202 learners in a post-secondary setting in Hong Kong. The study, designed to extend Horwitz's work and studies by Kern (1995) and Mantle-Bromley (1995), had as one of its aims to conduct empirical research to test Horwitz's (1988) hypothesis that some learner beliefs negatively affect language learning. The study used different data collection methods such as tests and interviews in conjunction with the BALLI in order to support and explain results. It also relied on grades and self-ratings to collect information about learners' proficiency.

Significant correlations were found in the study between three items in the BALLI (20, 14, and 9) and proficiency. Less proficient learners believed that learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning grammar and underestimated the difficulty of learning a foreign language, and more proficient learners disagreed with the notion that one should not speak the target language until one can say it correctly. Peacock pointed out the similarities between studies using the BALLI to explore learners' beliefs in that they have often yielded similar results for the items Horwitz outlined as being related to learners' expectations and language learning strategies.

Research by Tumposky (1991) and Horwitz (1999) also illustrates how the BALLI has been used to examine the relationship between language learner beliefs and learner variables. The learner variable in this case was cultural background. The BALLI was used to compare groups of learners of different cultural backgrounds in order to explore

the relationship between their beliefs about language learning and cultural background. Tumposky used the BALLI with 54 first-year Russian learners of ESL in the United States and 36 first-year university American learners of French and Spanish.

Findings of the study revealed cultural differences in learners' beliefs about foreign language learning. The Russian learners believed in the importance of risk-taking. Compared to the American learners, they also supported more the idea that speaking practice is important. The American learners saw little instrumental value in the learning of the foreign language, and did not think Americans valued the language. The Russian participants were a select group of learners enrolled in a programme prior to entrance in American universities, which may partly explain their commitment to risk-taking and to speaking as compared to the American learners.

Given the specific background of the Russian learners, Tumposky cautioned about establishing direct links between learners' cultural background and language learning beliefs. In fact, Horwitz's review of studies using the BALLI to compare cultural groups did not support clear relations between cultural background and language learning beliefs. Whereas preliminary findings indicated differences in beliefs between and among different heritage groups of learners, when considering responses to individual items in the Inventory, no clear-cut cultural differences in beliefs were revealed. Horwitz concluded that differences in beliefs may be more related to learning circumstances than to cultural background.

Yang's (1999) study also explored the relationship between learners' beliefs and learner variables, in this case use of language learning strategies. The study is also interesting because of its approach to the use of questionnaires to explore language

learning beliefs. While other studies use descriptive statistics to report on questionnaire responses, Yang's study used factor analysis to analyze responses. The data collection methods used in his study were the BALLI, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), developed by Oxford (1990), and a series of open-ended questions. Participants were 14 English as a second language classes (505 learners) in several universities in Taiwan.

Yang's use of factor analysis to analyze learners' responses to the BALLI and SILL resulted in the identification of four belief factors and six strategy factors. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to examine relationships between the belief factors and the strategy factors. Additionally, content analysis of the open-ended questions was conducted searching for recurring themes in order to complement and further explain statistical data. The study highlighted the types of beliefs about language learning which relate to strategy use. These were self-efficacy beliefs about learning English, or learners' beliefs about their ability to perform in English, and beliefs about the nature and value of learning spoken English. Self-efficacy beliefs about learning English related to strategy use, particularly the use of functional practice strategies. Additionally, beliefs about the nature and value of learning spoken English related to learners' use of formal oral-practice strategies.

Yang used the results of the study and drew from literature on language learners' beliefs, strategies, and motivation to develop a framework for the study of learners' beliefs that identifies a metacognitive and a motivational dimension of the construct. The metacognitive dimension includes what learners know about themselves as second language learners (proficiency, aptitude, learning style, personality, and social role). It

also includes what learners think about the task of second language learning (the general issue of foreign language aptitude, the nature and focus of language learning, the difficulty of language learning), and what learners believe about how best to learn a language (knowledge about language learning strategies). The motivational dimension relates to the questions “Can I learn the language?”, “Why am I learning this language?” and “How do I feel about learning this language?” (p. 532).

Hsieh (2004) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the different types of beliefs language learners hold. The study focused on learner attribution and self-efficacy beliefs and general language learning beliefs, and how these may relate to achievement. Participants were 500 Spanish, German, and French undergraduate students. Data collection relied on use of the BALLI and other self-report questionnaires of attitudes and motivation in relation to learning foreign languages. It also relied on learners’ attribution and self-efficacy ratings after they received two mid-semester exam grades.

Findings of the study revealed that several of the students’ beliefs identified by the BALLI changed over the course of the semester. For example, at the end of the semester they believed more in the usefulness of guessing in the foreign language, in language learning as being mostly a matter of knowing vocabulary, and in foreign language learning as being different from learning other subjects. They also believed more strongly that it is easier to read and write than to speak and understand, and that if one is allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on. Findings also revealed that self-efficacy correlated positively with ability and effort attributions, while it correlated negatively with luck and teacher attributions. Learners who made internal or stable attributions, whether for success or failure, had higher self-

efficacy beliefs than those who made external or unstable attributions. Learners who made internal attributions, and also those who made personal as opposed to non-personal attributions, had higher grades than those making external attributions.

Bernat (2006) used the BALLI in a study aiming to identify language learning beliefs in the context of learning English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at an Australian university. Participants were 262 students with a diversity of multi-ethnic backgrounds. Another objective was to explore whether beliefs are context-specific. For that purpose, Bernat compared findings of her study to those of a study conducted by Siebert (2003) with 156 learners of multi-ethnic background in a similar program in the US. Data analysis relied on frequency statistics. Findings revealed that the beliefs were similar in all categories for both groups of students. Bernat argued that individuals' "metacognitive structure," affected by "social, cultural, contextual, cognitive, affective, and personal factors" shapes language learning beliefs (Conclusion section, ¶1).

Studies Using other Questionnaires

Other studies have used responses to questionnaires to identify dimensions of learners' beliefs using factor analysis (e.g. Cotterall; 1995; 1999; Mori, 1999; Sakui & Gaies, 1999). These studies represent an alternative approach to the development and use of questionnaires in research on LLLBs. As Sakui and Gaies (1999) explain, there are two ways that learner belief questionnaires have typically been developed and analyzed. The first approach consists of "grouping items a priori into logically-derived categories, with the analysis of data focusing on similarities and differences in response patterns to items within a category" (p. 475). This approach would correspond to the way the

BALLI has often been used, as illustrated by some of the studies discussed in the previous section. Another approach is “to collect responses to a large set of items presumably tapping different beliefs and then to identify, on the basis of a statistical procedure such as factor analysis, a set of empirically-derived categories” (p. 475). The studies discussed in this section use the second approach. In this case, the use of a statistical procedure such as factor analysis to analyze questionnaire responses may be one step in the process of revising the questionnaire or of developing a framework for examining learners’ language learning beliefs.

Cotterall (1995) administered a questionnaire to a group of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) learners of different nationalities. The questionnaire items were drawn from literature on autonomous language learning and specifically tackled learners’ readiness for adopting beliefs and behaviours consistent with an autonomous approach to language learning. Using factor analysis, Cotterall identified six factors underlying questionnaire responses: role of the teacher; role of feedback; learner independence; learner confidence in study ability; experience of language learning; and approach to studying. The study also investigated the relationship of these factors with behaviors associated with autonomous language learning.

In a subsequent study with 131 learners of EAP at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, Cotterall (1999) added new factors drawing on the previous study and on literature in second language acquisition (SLA). Additionally, information was elicited from learners to examine what they believed about factors that the literature in SLA considers as promoting successful learning, such as the role of feedback, opportunities to practise, and knowledge of language learning strategies. Learners were

administered a questionnaire that required them to answer Likert items, rank sets of beliefs, rank descriptions of different learner types in reference to themselves, and write a letter advising a friend on language learning. Factor analysis identified six dimensions of learner beliefs. These related to the following: the role of the teacher; the role of feedback; learners' sense of self-efficacy; strategies considered important in successful learning; dimensions of strategies-related behaviour; and the nature of language learning. One relevant finding was learners' inability to use strategies for monitoring and evaluating learning, which was associated with lack of confidence.

Mori's (1999) study illustrates a similar approach to the use of questionnaires to gather data about learners' language learning beliefs. Mori used factor analysis to analyse responses to a beliefs questionnaire. The questionnaire items tackled 17 belief constructs drawn from the second language acquisition literature and the literature on epistemological beliefs, or beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning. The questionnaire was administered to 187 university learners of Japanese enrolled in courses at various levels in two universities in the eastern United States. Additionally, Mori compared learners' beliefs about language learning with epistemological beliefs, which were examined through an epistemological beliefs questionnaire. Both questionnaires used a Likert six-point scale. An additional purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between belief factors and achievement.

Regarding the relationship between learners' beliefs about language learning and epistemological beliefs, findings revealed that they were generally uncorrelated, which supports the idea of the specificity of language learning beliefs. Using factor analysis to analyse responses to the language learning beliefs questionnaire revealed six factors

underlying learner' language learning beliefs. These factors related to the following: the difficulty of learning kanji (Chinese characters borrowed or adapted from Japanese); the analytic approach to language learning; the effectiveness of risk taking in learning to communicate in a foreign language; the degree of tolerance for ambiguity and the tendency to seek for clear-cut answers; the belief that Japanese is easy; and the degree of reliance on knowledge of the first language.

Sakui and Gaies's (1999) study illustrates a similar approach to the development of a questionnaire for exploring LLLBs. Participants were 1,296 university Japanese learners of English. The aim of their study was to explore Japanese learners' beliefs about learning English. The study also aimed to examine the reliability of responses to language learning questionnaires for use with learners, and the usefulness of complementing data from questionnaire responses with qualitative data from individual and group interviews. Another purpose was to develop a validated questionnaire for use specifically with Japanese learners of English in institutions of higher education. The development of the final questionnaire for examining LLLBs involved different phases. First, a series of items was created using existing instruments for exploring learners' language learning beliefs. After consultations with instructors, the list of items was modified and the questionnaire was administered to learners in order to test for reliability. Factor analysis was used to search for patterns in learners' responses.

This analysis identified four factors underlying learners' responses. The first factor related to beliefs about a communicative orientation to learning English, which included items dealing, for example, with the enjoyment derived from studying English, the importance of oral practice, and the value of interacting with fluent speakers of English

and of using authentic materials as a source of language and cultural input. The second factor related to beliefs about a traditional orientation to learning English. The third one included beliefs about the quality and sufficiency of classroom instruction for learning English. It reflected the participants' beliefs in the lack of ability of Japanese people in language learning, their concerns about classroom instruction in itself leading to acquiring the four skills, and their belief in the difficulty of overcoming those limitations. The fourth factor related to beliefs about foreign language aptitude and difficulty.

Regarding the use of interviews to complement statistical data from learners' responses to the questionnaire, the study found that interviews offered further insight into learners' language learning beliefs. The use of interviews also pointed to problems with reliance on questionnaires alone for collecting data on language learning beliefs, as there are aspects of language learning beliefs that questionnaires do not tackle. For example, interviews revealed that questionnaire responses at different times may change because of actual changes in learners' beliefs. Additionally, the researchers indicated that beliefs are "situationally conditioned" (Sakui & Gaies, 1999, p. 481) and need to be considered in context, for example in relation to tasks. They also pointed to the usefulness of investigating LLLBs not only for learners themselves and instructors, but also for purposes of policy and program evaluation.

Studies Using Interviews

Studies of LLLBs have frequently used questionnaires for gaining insight into language learning beliefs, but they have also relied on data collection methods such as interviews. One common purpose of using interviews is for triangulation. Sakui and

Gaies's (1999) study reviewed in the previous section, in which individual and group interviews were used to complement data collected through questionnaires, illustrates this approach to the use of interviews in research on learners' language learning beliefs.

An alternative approach is to use interviews as the main data collection method in order to explore LLLBs inductively. As opposed to using highly structured instruments for data collection such as closed-item questionnaires, interviews have the advantage of giving learners the opportunity to expand on, explain, and contextualise their responses (Victori, 2004). According to this approach, interview texts are analysed and findings are typically presented in terms of recurrent or major themes emerging from the interviews. One example of this approach is Wenden's (1987) study. Wenden conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 adults enrolled in ESL classes at Columbia University. The purpose of her study was to analyze learners' beliefs about how best to learn a language. Additionally, the study examined whether those beliefs were reflected in the learners' approach to language learning. Learners were asked to keep a record of the situations in which they used English over the course of a week, and were then interviewed about those situations. The interviews were content analysed.

Beliefs were classified into three categories associated with approaches to second language learning. These related to the importance of using the language; the need to learn about the language; and the importance of personal factors. Five beliefs were identified in relation to using the language. Participants believed in the possibility of learning languages in an out-of-classroom context; the need to use the language as often as possible; the need to "think" in the second language, or focus on meaning rather than translating; the usefulness of living in an immersion context; and the need not to be

excessively concerned about accuracy. In relation to learning about the language, participants referred to the need to learn grammar and vocabulary, the usefulness of taking formal courses, the importance of learning from mistakes, and the importance of deliberate, conscious effort in learning a language. Three beliefs were identified in relation to personal factors. Participants referred to emotion and feelings in relation to language learning, and self-concept was perceived as important, as well as aptitude for learning.

White (1999) explored the developing beliefs of beginner adult language learners of Japanese and Spanish ranging in age from 22 to 47 years learning in a self-instruction language learning context. The study focused on their expectations of language learning in the new context and on how these expectations changed and beliefs about the new self-instructed learning context developed. The study differed from other studies of learners' beliefs in that the learning context was one of university distance self-instructed language learning. Twenty-three learners participated in the first three phases of the study, and 19 of them completed the other two phases as well. The phenomenographic study used an "iterative data collection cycle" to investigate learners' experiences (p. 443). Over the course of 15 months, data were collected through a variety of methods, such as interviews, ranking exercises, questionnaires, and scenarios. The last stage involved using "yoked subject procedures" requesting learners to explain how they would represent self-instructed learning to someone planning to take the same course the following year (p. 445).

Three constructs emerged from learners' conceptualisations of the initial stages of self-instructed language learning: the learner-context interface; tolerance of ambiguity;

and locus of control. In terms of tolerance of ambiguity, participants expressed uncertainty either about themselves as learners or their understanding of the material. Participants highlighted several responses to this uncertainty, which included affective control (e.g. acknowledging feelings, or deciding to return to the material at a later time), engagement (e.g. revision) and seeking external support from others. In terms of locus of control, the factors that participants described as determinants of success were largely internal. They ranked highest internal factors such as motivation, persistence, and self-knowledge. Additionally, the study revealed individual differences in terms of locus of control and tolerance of ambiguity suggesting that, apart from beliefs, learner “characteristics or predispositions” played a role in how learners conceptualised and experienced language learning in the context of the study (p. 456).

Barcelos (1995) used an ethnographic approach in a study exploring learner beliefs from the perspective of their “culture of learning languages.” Participants were 14 English majors in a Brazilian university. The data collection methods used were interviews, classroom observation, and open-ended questionnaires. Three main beliefs were identified. These related to the ideas that language learning means learning grammar, that the teacher has a central role in ensuring that learning takes place, and that English-speaking countries are the ideal site for learning English. The study also provided insight into the origins of learners’ beliefs as being related to learners’ previous language-learning experiences.

In a subsequent study, Barcelos (2000) used an ethnographic approach to explore the interactions between the language learning beliefs of three Brazilian students of English and three teachers at an English language institute in the US. The data collection

methods included interviews, classroom observation, and stimulated recalls. Learner beliefs about the role of learners and teachers related to their beliefs about their proficiency level and their English classes. The study revealed the role of previous experience in shaping beliefs. The origins of learners' beliefs were "rooted in their language learning experiences" (p. 286), deriving from their connections between present and past experiences.

In a qualitative study, Alfa (2004) used interviews to identify and describe the beliefs of Greek learners of Spanish about learning Spanish. The study also aimed to explore learners' perceptions of what aspects of learning Spanish pose no difficulty and which ones present difficulties, to examine if beliefs changed when learners began instruction, to examine learners' view of their role and the role of the instructor, and retrospectively to analyse what aspects of language learning the learners would change. The interviews were semi-structured and directed.

In an initial phase of the study, an original version of the interview questions was tested with three adult Greek learners of Spanish in language schools or in a context of immersion in Spain. The interview questions were modified and the final interview questions were used with five learners of Spanish enrolled in advanced level courses in the Cervantes Institute in Athens, Greece. The study includes the transcriptions and analyses of one of the first interviews in Spain and two of the subsequent interviews with learners in Greece. Discourse analysis was used to analyse all three interviews. Findings are presented in terms of five major topics emerging from the interviews: general ideas about learning Spanish; strategies; needs; what helps learning Spanish; and difficulties involved in learning Spanish. Participants considered Spanish easy to learn. In terms of

strategies, they emphasised the usefulness of comparing Spanish to the other languages they knew. They also considered that their knowledge of French had facilitated learning Spanish. They had similar goals of attaining an advanced proficiency level. Two of the learners referred to difficulty in speaking. Findings also revealed differences in beliefs among the three learners and in their process of learning Spanish. They differed in terms of their preferences in relation to autonomous language learning and their level of satisfaction with their level of proficiency in relation with their original expectations.

Contribution of this Study

This study explores the beliefs of self-identified successful learners of Spanish as a foreign language in a higher education setting in Canada. Some studies have investigated the beliefs of successful and unsuccessful language learners or have related language learning beliefs with proficiency (e.g. Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Samimy & Lee, 1997). In that research, success or achievement in language learning has typically been considered on the basis of grades alone, with few exceptions (e.g. Peacock, 1999; Hsieh, 2004). The present study used an alternative approach to the identification of successful learners based on grades, allowing participants to self-identify as successful learners of Spanish.

Compared to other studies of LLLBs, the present study did not rely on questionnaire data alone. As Sakui and Gaies (1999) recommended, the study used a combination of data collection methods, consisting of an online discussion and individual online interviews, in order to gain deeper, more holistic insight into beliefs and to achieve triangulation. In studies based on learner belief questionnaires, the focus is typically on

large groups of learners and on reporting numerical questionnaire results for the whole group. The present study, however, focused on individual profiles of learner beliefs and cross-case analysis of individual learners' beliefs. The study also differs from other studies of LLLBs in that data collection was conducted online.

In the Canadian context of bilingualism, there has been extensive research on the attitudes of learners of French as a second language using the socio-educational model of second language acquisition (see Gardner, 1985). This model establishes an indirect relationship between attitudes and success in language learning. Attitudes affect motivation, which affects SLA. It appears, however, that less research has comparatively been conducted on the beliefs of learners of Spanish in a Canadian context.

Summary

This chapter reviewed studies on LLLBs with a focus on the different data collection methods used in research on LLLBs and sections were organized accordingly. A line of enquiry on LLLBs has used the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), developed by Horwitz (1988), either on its own or combined with other data collection methods. Those studies have typically reported aggregate results. They have described learners' beliefs about language learning in order to explain how learner expectations and strategies may influence those beliefs and to reveal misconceptions that learners may have about language learning (e.g. Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Mantle-Bromley, 1995). Other studies have focused on examining learner beliefs in relation to particular variables, such as cultural background (e.g. Tumposky, 1991; Horwitz, 1999) or language learning strategies (Yang, 1992). Hsieh (2004) used the BALLI together

with other data collection methods in a study focused on learner attribution and self-efficacy beliefs as well as general language learning beliefs in relation to achievement. Bernat (2006) used it to identify the beliefs of students learning English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at an Australian university

Other questionnaires besides the BALLI have also developed and used to explore LLLBs. Some of them have used factor analysis to identify dimensions of learners' beliefs (e.g. Cotterall; 1995; 1999; Mori, 1999; Sakui & Gaies, 1999). The purpose of those studies may be to revise a questionnaire or to develop a framework for examining learners' language learning beliefs.

Other studies of LLLBs have relied primarily on interviews to gain more in-depth insight into beliefs and investigate beliefs inductively. Findings are typically presented in terms of recurrent or major themes emerging from the interviews. Wenden (1987) investigated learners' beliefs about how best to learn a language. White (1999) explored beliefs in a self-instruction language learning context. Barcelos (1995, 2000) adopted an ethnographic approach to explore learner beliefs about language learning. In a qualitative study, Alfa (2004) used interviews to identify and describe the language learning beliefs of Greek learners of Spanish.

The present study explored the beliefs of self-identified successful learners of Spanish as a foreign language in a Canadian university. The study used an alternative approach to the identification of successful learners based on grades. It allowed participants to self-identify as successful learners of Spanish. Compared to studies that rely exclusively on questionnaires to elicit LLLBs, it used a combination of data collection methods. Additionally, the focus was not on the beliefs of groups of learners,

as has been customary in studies using questionnaires, but on profiles of individual learners' beliefs and cross-case comparison of their beliefs. The present study also differs from other studies of LLLBs in that data were collected online. It also investigates LLLBs in a Canadian context, where beliefs about learning Spanish as a foreign language have been relatively unexplored.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

Introduction

The present study used a combination of data collection techniques to gain insight into the beliefs of self-identified successful learners of Spanish at the university level. We administered the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) online. We also conducted an online discussion as well as individual online interviews with participants in order to probe deeper into their beliefs. The goal of combining different data collection methods was to gain an in-depth, holistic understanding of individual learners' beliefs.

This chapter describes the methodology employed in the study and includes a rationale for the data collection techniques used. It begins with a section describing case study design, which guided our investigation of learners' language learning beliefs (LLLBs). This section is followed by an introduction to the different methods used to explore LLLBs in order to briefly examine the main methodological issues involved in studying LLLBs and how approaches to the study of this topic have evolved. Following this section is a description of the study's participants, recruitment, online administration of the BALLI, online discussion, and individual online interviews. Member checking procedures are also described. The chapter continues with an explanation of how the data were analysed to create individual profiles of learners' beliefs.

Approaches to the Study of Learners' Language Learning Beliefs

Pajares (1992) noted that as a general construct belief poses challenges for empirical investigation. In relation to the difficulty of investigating beliefs, Pajares drew on Rokeach (1968), who argued that an understanding of beliefs requires making inferences, and that individuals may be not able or willing to represent their beliefs accurately. In this sense, beliefs “cannot be directly observed or measured but must be inferred from what people say, intend, or do” (Pajares, 1992, p. 314).

The difficulty of eliciting beliefs may explain why researchers have used different approaches to investigating learners' second- and foreign- language learning. Some researchers have provided reviews of methodology in research on language learners' beliefs (see Barcelos, 2000; Kalaja, 1995; Victori, 2004) and have considered what methods may effectively be employed to elicit LLLBs. Kalaja (1995) reviewed studies of learners' beliefs in second language acquisition (SLA) research and formulated her view of beliefs, in which they are “emerging from interaction,” “socially constructed,” “variable,” and cannot be considered to influence language learning directly (p. 196). She proposes to focus on texts (talk or writing) and use a naturalistic approach to analyse learners' beliefs and their functions in texts.

Barcelos (2000) identified three approaches to the study of learners' language learning beliefs (LLLb), the normative, the metacognitive, and the contextual approach. In terms of their methodological emphases, the normative approach is one that infers beliefs from a pre-determined set of statements; the metacognitive approach infers beliefs from students' self-reports and interviews; and the contextual approach uses ethnography, narratives, and metaphors to explore LLLBs. Victori (2004) focused on the advantages

and disadvantages of different data collection methods used to elicit LLLBs. Victori argues that, when considering which procedure to use,

We have to decide what our purpose is, whether to explore learners' beliefs at length or simply describe them; what kind of data we want to obtain (qualitative or quantitative) and how we want to analyze it, and how many learners we want to work with, as all these decisions will determine which type of instrument we use. (p. 7)

Some research on LLLBs has used highly structured, closed-item questionnaires to elicit beliefs, such as the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (Horwitz, 1988). However, using questionnaires alone may not provide an accurate picture of beliefs (Kalaja, 1995; Sakui & Gaies, 1999). Sakui and Gaies (1999) argued that studies need to combine different data collection methods for triangulation purposes and to provide a deeper understanding of learners' beliefs. Using interviews as opposed to questionnaires presents some advantages. Interviews "allow learners to reveal beliefs which are not addressed in the questionnaire and to describe the reasons, sources, behavioural outcomes, and other dimensions of their beliefs" (p. 486).

In studies of LLLBs that rely on questionnaires, findings are usually reported in terms of group measures. However, attention to the beliefs of individuals may reveal intra-group differences and provide a different picture of learner beliefs. In her seminal study of foreign language learners' beliefs, Horwitz (1988) noted that there were within-group differences in responses, which were most pronounced in relation to the difficulty of language learning. She also suggested that, because there was a variety of responses within each item, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, "it seems likely that language teachers in a variety of settings could encounter students holding any of the beliefs

inventoried by the BALLI” (p. 291), and that the BALLI could be useful for instructors, not only to determine popular learner beliefs, but also to “identify minority groups (or individuals) with differing opinions” (p. 291). Horwitz’s comments suggest the usefulness of considering the diversity of beliefs within a group and focusing on individuals’ beliefs.

Like Horwitz, in the conclusion of a study of learner beliefs about self-directed language learning, Broady (1996) noted that “there may be distinct sets of beliefs held within the student group” (p. 224). Kern’s (1995) study demonstrated that paying attention to group or to individual learners’ beliefs might yield different findings. In his study, responses to the BALLI were markedly similar for two groups of language learners, but when considering individual responses it was revealed that “considerable individual variation exists within both groups” (p. 76). Kern considers that one implication of this finding is that focusing on the beliefs of individual learners might offer additional insights:

The differences found between the global and particular analyses indicate the importance of supplementing group-level analyses with examination of individual learners. Because beliefs are based on idiosyncratic personal factors as well as general sociocultural forces, it is ultimately just as important to explain individual tendencies as it is to make generalizations about large groups of learners. (pp. 81-82)

In relation to the usefulness of paying attention to the language learning beliefs of individuals, Cotterall (1999) suggested that research could “explore whether ‘profiles’ of learner beliefs can be identified” in order to “further our understanding of the framework

within which language learners operate” (p. 510). Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005) have argued for this type of focus in research on LLLBs. They have proposed that research could explore, for example, whether learners with different learning styles hold different beliefs about language learning.

Case Study

Case study design guided the investigation of individual learners’ beliefs in this study. Yin (2003) defines case study as an “empirical enquiry” with two main characteristics. It “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 14). It also “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulated fashion” (p. 14). The goal of conducting case studies is “to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)” (p. 10). Yin conceives of case study as a research strategy in its own right. This strategy is comprehensive in that it “comprises an all-encompassing method-covering the logic of design, data collection, techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (p. 14). Like other research strategies, case study is “a way of investigating empirical topics by following a set of prespecified procedures” (p. 15).

In terms of data collection in case study research, Yin (2003) specifies three principles to ensure quality control. The first one is using “multiple sources of evidence” (p. 97) for triangulation. Another principle is creating a case study database which contains and organizes all the data collected. Finally, maintaining a “chain of evidence”

is also relevant in case study to increase reliability. Maintaining a change of evidence relates to the possibility of tracing the derivation of any evidence.

Patton (1990) details the procedures involved in constructing case studies. When conducting case study, it is necessary to keep in mind that “the case study approach to qualitative analysis is a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. The purpose is to gather “comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest” (p. 384). The starting point, Patton indicates, is “making sure that the information for each case is as complete as possible” (p. 384). Patton describes three steps in constructing case studies. The first step is collecting all raw case data, which is all the information the researcher has about each particular case. The second step is constructing a case record by condensing the raw case data. In this step, “information is edited, redundancies are sorted out, parts are fitted together, and the case record is organized for ready access” (p. 387). This step is often omitted unless there is a considerable amount of unedited raw data. The third step is writing the actual case study, which “includes the information that will be communicated in the final report” (p. 387).

As Patton (1990) points out, when reporting on the research conducted, several case studies may be compared and contrasted, but “the basic descriptive data of the study are the cases” (p. 387). Cross-case analysis is possible, but the required initial phase of analysis involves that each case “be represented and understood as an idiosyncratic manifestation of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 387). Finally, a well-written case study allows the reader to understand the case as a “unique” entity, and is “holistic” and “comprehensive” (p. 387).

Overview of Methods

The present study relied on case study design to guide the investigation of individual learners' language learning beliefs. Following Yin's (2003) approach to case study research, it relied on a combination of data collection methods in which data "converge[d] in a triangulated fashion" (p. 14). It was estimated that the combination of methods would help gain holistic, in-depth insight into beliefs and constitute a step in meeting the need in case study to gather "comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information" (Patton, 1990, p. 384). Data collection relied on use of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) combined with an online discussion and individual online interviews. It took place in a four-week period during the Fall Semester of 2005 at a Canadian university. The proposal for the study had previously received ethics' approval from the institution.

For the purpose of data collection, a shell in WebCT™ was created specifically for the study. This learning management system was chosen because it is the management system used by the university where the study was conducted. After recruitment and prior to participation, those who volunteered to participate in the study received instructions through e-mail on how to access the WebCT shell. The BALLI questionnaire was administered online in the shell. Individuals were able to access and submit their questionnaire privately. The online discussion was conducted using the discussion forum feature in WebCT, through which participants were able to post messages and view the other participants' messages. The individual online interviews were conducted privately through one-on-one communication using the e-mail feature in WebCT. At any time, participants had the possibility of using e-mail to communicate one-on-one through

WebCT. Additionally, they had access to a list of online resources related to the Spanish language and Hispanic cultures which was compiled and posted as a way of thanking them for volunteering to participate. The introductory WebCT template that participants first viewed when logging into the shell is included in Appendix A.

The following sections describe participants, recruitment, as well as the phases involved in data collection. They also describe the data collection methods used as well as the rationale for their use.

Participants and Recruitment

Participants were recruited on a volunteer basis from a Canadian university. Recruitment took place at the beginning of the 2005 Fall Semester. The goal was to recruit participants who identified themselves as successful learners of Spanish. Participants were recruited among students enrolled in an Elementary Spanish course and an Intermediate Spanish course. The course for beginners was excluded because most learners in that course have no previous experience learning Spanish and therefore potential participants would not have been able to identify themselves as successful learners of Spanish at the beginning of the semester.

We obtained permission from instructors to recruit participants during regular class time in a session at the beginning of the semester. In that session, we described the purpose of the project, which was to explore the beliefs of successful Spanish learners. We explained that participation in the study related to participants' self-identification as successful Spanish learners, and that the definition of success in the study was broad and need not be based on grades. Success was described as relating to such factors as: peer

recognition or recognition by others (family, teachers...); perceived success in language learning, perceived high motivation, effort, enjoyment, or satisfaction in relation to learning Spanish or other languages, or any other factors that participants considered related to their success as learners of Spanish. Finally, all students were provided with consent forms. They were asked to return the forms to us at the end of the following class, indicating one of two options on the form, “I have read the information about this study and provide my consent to participate in the study,” or “I do not wish to participate in the study, thank you.” The consent form is included in Appendix B.

At the beginning of the study, a total of 28 people provided their consent to participate in the study. All of these participants were included with the expectation that demands of the study would result in attrition. Attrition resulted during the different phases of the study. A total of eight participants completed all the requirements for participation, which involved taking the questionnaire online, participating in the online discussion, and answering the additional individual questions which were used to probe deeper into beliefs.

Phase One: Online Administration of the BALLI

We administered the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (see Horwitz, 1988) in order to gain initial insight into learners’ beliefs. It is a closed-item questionnaire with 34 Likert-scale items corresponding to five dimensions of language learning beliefs. We included space at the end of the questionnaire for two extra open-ended items. For reference to the statements used in the questionnaire for each of the BALLI 34 items, see Appendix C. The statements in that appendix are organised

according to the five BALLI dimensions. The online questionnaire as presented to participants in WebCT, with the two extra items added to it, is included in Appendix D.

We administered the BALLI online using the shell in WebCT specifically designed for the study. Individuals submitted the questionnaire privately. The version of the BALLI that participants were given was the version for use with foreign language learners. It consists of 34 items on a five-item Likert scale which survey beliefs about foreign language learning regarding five dimensions: The Difficulty of Language Learning; Foreign Language Aptitude; The Nature of Language Learning; Learning and Communication Strategies; and Motivation and Expectations. For this study, the wording of the 34 statements in the BALLI was modified as necessary in order to focus on beliefs about learning the Spanish language in particular. One of the items asked participants to comment on any of the 34 questionnaire statements. The second one asked them to explain why they considered themselves successful learners of Spanish. The process of administration and analysis of the questionnaire took 14 days in total, and 22 people answered it.

Phase Two: Online Discussion in WebCT

Once the BALLI had been administered, participants moved on to the next phase of the study, which involved participation in an online discussion. The purpose of this phase was to gain deeper insight into learners' beliefs. The discussion was also conducted asynchronously using the shell designed for the study in WebCT. Because of the capabilities of the tools in WebCT, responses could be viewed by the other participants. Participants answered questions about language learning and learning Spanish in

particular. From 22 people who answered the questionnaire, 13 continued on to the discussion.

Prior to participation in the study, guidance in using WebCT was offered to participants through individual training sessions. The sessions explained the process of accessing the shell and using the tools in WebCT required for posting, answering, and viewing messages. None of the participants requested this type of assistance. The only technical assistance provided was for two participants who had not been able to open the online questionnaire prior to the discussion.

The discussion consisted of five prompts reflecting the five dimensions of the BALLI. The five prompts in the BALLI are the following: The Difficulty of Language Learning; Foreign Language Aptitude; The Nature of Language Learning; Learning and Communication Strategies; and Motivation and Expectations. Design of the prompts involved modifying and adapting the dimensions of the BALLI for use in the online discussion in order to elicit participants' beliefs in depth. For example, the first prompt, entitled "Learning Spanish: Is it easy or hard?," presented participants with the following questions for discussion: "Do you believe that Spanish is easy or hard to learn and why?; Is it harder to speak than to write it, or to listen than to read it? Why do you believe so?; How does Spanish compare to other languages in terms of easiness or difficulty?; How long do you think it would take for someone to learn Spanish well?" For each prompt, participants were asked to post a message in which they discussed their beliefs in relation to the given prompt. Appendix E includes the message welcoming participants to the discussion. Appendix F includes another message with instructions for the discussion.

Phase Three: Individual Online Interviews

While phase one and two of the study followed each other, phase three, consisting of additional individual online interviews, was conducted simultaneously with the discussion in phase two. The e-mail feature in WebCT was used in phase three. The additional individualised probing questions through e-mail communication with each participant constituted private, one-on-one discussions simultaneous with participants' responses to the five prompts in the discussion as described in phase two. From the 13 participants that began phase two of the study, eight completed phases two and three. Data collected from those eight participants was used for the study.

The purpose of the additional questions in phase three was to probe deeper into LLLBs and to elicit more information about LLLBs to complement and further understand information elicited using the BALLI and the online discussion. While prompts used in the online discussion, as described in phase two, were the same for all participants, the questions in the private online interviews conducted by e-mail were individualised. We had information about learners' beliefs available from individual responses to the BALLI, and also from their responses in the discussion. This information was useful for probing learners' beliefs individually. For example, we were able to probe into the learners' beliefs by asking them why they had those beliefs, and could also refer to responses to the BALLI or messages posted in the discussion. The use of the probing questions in the form of private communication through e-mail with each participant contributed to the in-depth and holistic insight by complementing and further explaining information elicited using the other data collection methods.

Member Checking

Member checking took place the week after the process of data collection finished. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to member checking as one method used in qualitative research to ascertain trustworthiness of data. Member checks may be conducted in different ways, e.g. formally, informally, during interviews, after interviews (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). In this study, member checking was conducted by sending all the data collected from each individual to each participant through e-mail for review and validation. The information sent included participants' responses to the online questionnaire, answers to the prompts in the discussion, and answers to the probing questions in the individual online interviews. Individuals were provided with the ability to choose to edit or eliminate any parts of the texts they received. None of the participants asked for any changes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and took place during several stages, beginning with the data collection process (see Stake, 1995). Raw case data were assembled beginning in phase one of the data collection process in order to eventually form a case study database which contained all case evidence (see Yin, 2003). Also beginning in phase one, data were being analysed as they were collected. During phase one of the data collection process, analysis of individual BALLI results was useful to obtain an initial general individual profile of language learning beliefs. While the discussion was taking place as described in phase two, we viewed messages daily. Therefore, for each participant, we had information available from the analysis of individual responses to the BALLI and

from the ongoing discussion. These two types of information were used for the elaboration of the probing questions used in phase three of data collection, conducted simultaneously with phase two.

After completion of the discussion and additional individual online interviews, we were able to proceed to compile all information collected for each individual through the different data collection methods. As we collected data online, they were available in written format and could be organised in digital files. Individual case evidence consisted of the results of the 34 questionnaire items for each participant. It also consisted of transcripts of responses to the two items added to the questionnaire, the five discussion prompts, and the additional probing questions in the individual online interviews. All individual case evidence was collected and grouped by participant. The goal was to obtain as much information as possible about each learner's beliefs.

Once all case study evidence was collected, we conducted analysis of the transcripts containing participants' comments. The transcripts contained all of participants' contributions except for the 34 Likert-scale BALLI items, which were closed items, as described above. Analysis of the transcripts was conducted using an approach relying on open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). Open coding consists of breaking data open in order to identify relevant concepts. Open coding was followed by axial coding, which facilitates developing categories and building connections within categories, i.e. between categories and sub-categories. The unit of analysis was the sentence and sometimes the clause. The clause was used as the unit of analysis for a more fine-grained analysis. Using this unit was necessary because the participants in some cases constructed long sentences and referred to different aspects of beliefs in the same

sentence. Labelling codes reflected concepts identified in the transcripts. Sometimes the codes were instead expressed in the form of full statements in order to accurately reflect participants' beliefs. More than one code was assigned to the same unit when necessary. For an example of initial coding of a fragment of a transcript, see Appendix G. The fragment corresponds to a participant's answer to one of the online interview questions.

Descriptive profiles of individual learner beliefs were then created. These profiles were based on responses to the 34 questionnaire items for each participant as well as analysis of the transcripts. The transcripts included the two items added to the questionnaire, as well as answers to the five discussion prompts and the additional probing questions in the individual online interviews. The findings were organised in terms of the five BALLI belief dimensions. This format is used for reporting on the findings of the study, which are presented as descriptive profiles of individual learners' beliefs about language learning and about learning Spanish in Chapter five. A case description analytic approach was used for the profiles, following Yin (2003), who describes the development of "a descriptive framework for organising the case study" (p. 144) as an analytic strategy in case study.

Apart from focusing on individual profiles of beliefs, the study also included cross-case comparison of beliefs. The rationale for conducting cross-case analysis, as Glaser and Strauss (1967, 1970) highlight, is to deepen understanding and explanation. This comparison is presented in Chapter six, where findings are discussed.

Summary

This chapter began with an introduction to case study design, which guided the investigation of learners' language learning beliefs in the present study. It briefly reviewed the methods that have been used to explore LLLBs. Additionally, the chapter described the data collection methods used in the study, as well as participants, recruitment, and the different phases of data collection, which were followed by member checking. Participants were recruited among students at a Canadian university who were enrolled in an Elementary Spanish course and an Intermediate Spanish course during the 2005 Fall semester. They all identified themselves as successful Spanish learners. Attrition occurred during the different phases of the study, and a final total of eight participants completed all the requirements for participation. The study used a combination of data collection methods to explore the beliefs of self-identified successful learners of Spanish at the university level. The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) was administered online. Two open-ended items were added to the questionnaire. After the questionnaire was administered, an online discussion was conducted. Additionally, online individual interviews were conducted with participants in order to probe deeper into their beliefs.

Analysis in this study was ongoing and took place during several stages. An approach relying on use of open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2002) was used to analyse participants' transcripts. Both questionnaire results and analysis of transcripts of responses collected through the other more open-ended data collection methods were used to create individual profiles of learner beliefs as well as to conduct cross-case analysis of beliefs.

CHAPTER FIVE

Presentation of Individual Profiles

Introduction

This chapter presents profiles of the beliefs of the study's eight participants. We created the profiles based on questionnaire answers, as well as on analysis of answers to the two open-ended items added to the questionnaire, online discussion prompts, and individual online interview questions. Each participant's profile is divided into two sections. The first section presents, in tabular format, the questionnaire results for each participant. Each table is organised according to the five BALLI dimensions and contains responses to all 34 items. The BALLI dimensions refer to the following: (1) the difficulty of language learning; (2) foreign language aptitude; (3) the nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; and (5) motivations and expectations. For this study, the items were adapted to focus on the Spanish language. For reference to the statements used in the questionnaire for each of the 34 items, see Appendix C. The second section presents a descriptive profile of the individual's beliefs. Each profile covers all five BALLI dimensions, which were used to frame data collection in the questionnaire and online discussion. The profiles, however, are not structured systematically around the five BALLI dimensions. This is because participants raised at once points that related to different BALLI dimensions. Slight differences in the length of individual profiles relate to the fact that some participants' contributions were longer than others. Pseudonyms are used to identify the eight participants.

Because the focus of this chapter is on individual learners, results of the questionnaire items were not statistically analysed or presented as group percentages, as has been customary in studies using the BALLI to investigate learners' language learning beliefs. Results were instead presented for each participant in order to highlight individual responses and as a complement to the descriptive profiles. The profiles provided an opportunity to gain in-depth insight into each individual's beliefs, which would not have been possible through the use of closed-ended data collection methods. They also allowed for access to personalised descriptive accounts of learner beliefs.

Profile of Margaret

Margaret's questionnaire answers are presented in Table 1. The table is followed by a descriptive profile of her language learning beliefs.

Table 1. Margaret's questionnaire responses.

Dimension	Items					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other
1	6	3, 24	28	5		4-D 14-D
2	15	1, 33, 34	22, 32	2, 10, 29		
3		8, 25	11	16, 20	26	
4	12, 17, 19	13, 21	7	9, 18		
5	31	23, 27	30			

Margaret is a second year student working on a major in Linguistics and German and a minor in Spanish. Her area of focus in Linguistics is language acquisition. She has studied formally multiple languages such as French, Spanish, and German. Informally,

she has studied Cantonese and Russian and has set future learning goals for the formal study of Russian and Japanese.

Margaret considers Spanish “by far the easiest language” in comparison with other languages such as German and Russian. Also in contrast with Spanish, she found it difficult to learn Cantonese and Russian informally from friends. She believes that with “a background in any of the romance languages,” it should not be difficult to learn Spanish. She insists that Spanish is “one of the easiest languages” she has learned by affirming: “My thoughts just flow easily in Spanish.” However, difficulty in learning a language does not deter Margaret from enjoying it. In this regard, she expresses her “love” of speaking German but notes: “My thoughts do not always come across as clearly as I would like.”

Margaret describes Spanish as a widely accessible language and believes that “everyone can learn Spanish.” She relates her success in learning the language with the fact that she finds it “relatively easy to understand Spanish, whether it be written or spoken.” She frequently uses the words “fun” and “love” to describe the pleasure that she derives from learning Spanish in both formal and informal settings. She particularly enjoys oral communication in Spanish and finds the language “a lot of fun to speak.”

Despite her expressed interest in and love of languages, Margaret confesses that she “quit learning French” and “gave up” on it. Initially, she thought that it was “too hard,” but “after helping children learn it,” she realized she “just didn’t like it.” Her dislike “grew more and more” with the years and she perceived a lack of sense of progress in it. As an alternative, she “picked up some Spanish books and Spanish music and started learning.” In high school, neither her experiences with French or Spanish were positive.

She saw her peers in French language courses as more advanced, and found the Spanish class not challenging and the teaching ineffective. However, she continued learning Spanish. Margaret's enjoyment of Spanish as opposed to French relates to contact with the Spanish culture and native speakers and her intrinsic motivation to learn Spanish:

I found lots of ways to have fun with Spanish, more so than French... I've been in more contact with Spanish speaking people than French.... Spanish never felt like a chore to study because it was something that I wanted to do for myself.

Margaret actually highlights her appeal for socio-cultural interactions with native speakers of Spanish in authentic communicative contexts. She also emphasises that "the best way to learn any language is to speak with native speakers." Interactions with native speakers play an important role in her perception of her success with Spanish. In fact, she considers herself a successful language learner because she is "able to successfully communicate with Spanish speakers." As an example, she describes experiences volunteering with Colombian children which helped her "gain confidence" while "hav[ing] fun" with Spanish.

Because of her belief in the importance of speaking with natives, Margaret highlights her experiences with native speakers of Spanish. She refers to having received reinforcement from native speakers of Spanish regarding her speaking skills. She also expresses a positive view of them in that they are "willing to help" her with the language and describes her experiences with native speakers of Spanish in terms of reciprocity. For example, when volunteering, she helps "many children from Colombia improve their English" and, in turn, they help her with Spanish.

In her questionnaire answers, Margaret indicated that it is easier to speak than understand Spanish. She strongly agreed with the statement “If I heard someone speaking Spanish, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.” Margaret’s comments also reflect her comfort in speaking Spanish: “I never care when I speak Spanish. I am glad to speak Spanish in front of someone.” Margaret sees “shyness” in speaking and “feeling intimidated” as obstacles for language learners to practice and learn. She sees errors as natural and as a source of learning: “I truly learn from my mistakes.... If I make a mistake when speaking to a native speaker, chances are they make mistakes in English. I laugh with others at my mistakes. It’s a lot of fun making mistakes sometimes.” Margaret refers to strategies she uses when speaking with natives, such as guessing the meanings of words and not resorting to English. Despite her willingness to take advantage of opportunities to speak to native speakers and her comfort in speaking, Margaret does not consider herself “a fluent speaker.” She clarifies what she means by fluency as follows: “I still make mistakes and fumble for words, of course, which I learn from.” She also identifies listening in authentic contexts, “when someone speaks very fast,” as a particular difficulty in Spanish.

Apart from emphasising the importance of practicing oral productive and receptive skills, Margaret highlights the importance of the syntactic and semantic components of Spanish in producing comprehensible output: “Both grammar and vocabulary should be looked at equally.” The distinction between these two components is also manifest when Margaret mentions that she loves reading in Spanish because reading “helps build vocabulary and reinforce grammar skills.” Similarly, when pointing to the similarities between Spanish and the other romance languages, she refers to their “common

vocabulary and grammar.” She argues that mastering the semantic component of Spanish is more demanding in time than its syntactic mastery: “In four to five years one should have Spanish and its grammar mastered, perhaps not all the vocabulary.”

Besides the distinction between the syntactic and semantic components of Spanish, Margaret distinguishes between learning Spanish formally and informally. She believes that informal socio-cultural immersion will promote proficiency in Spanish faster than learning in a formal didactic context. She also sees the two types of learning as opposed in that “the classroom provides you with the basics while being in a Spanish-speaking environment lets you put this knowledge to everyday use.” She also describes autonomous ways in which she practices listening as an alternative to less authentic practice in a formal context: “I admit that I have never gone to the language lab. For practicing my pronunciation I listen to Spanish music.” She refers to a Russian acquaintance who “translates directly from Russian to English” to illustrate her view of the ineffectiveness of translating from the first language. In contrast, she states: “I prefer to think in Spanish and only Spanish because relying on translations is not always effective.”

Margaret’s motivation for learning Spanish is both intrinsic and extrinsic. While she “started off learning Spanish just for fun” and finds learning languages “a way to get to know more of this world and the people in it,” she also thinks it opens up job possibilities, especially in the area of English as a Second Language education.

Profile of Frank

Frank's questionnaire answers are presented in Table 2. The table is followed by a descriptive profile of his language learning beliefs.

Table 2. Frank's questionnaire responses.

Dimension	Items					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other
1	3, 6, 28	5		24		4-D 14-C
2	10, 34	1, 15, 32	22, 33	2	29	
3	11, 25	8, 16	20, 26			
4	17, 21	7, 13, 18, 19			9, 12	
5	23	27	31	30		

Frank is a second year student doing a major in Biochemistry and a minor in History. He has studied Spanish for four years and is taking intermediate Spanish at university as an elective course. He is learning Spanish because it “provides job opportunities,” and “it is very difficult to get by in a country in which you do not speak the native language.” In addition, he has “always wanted to have a second language.” Frank studied the language in high school for two years. The summer before he started university, he spent three weeks in Spain enrolled in a language and culture course. He “really enjoyed the experience,” and it “further inspired” him to study the language and culture. He has set personal goals for continuing learning Spanish and he even intends to study the language “independently” if he cannot register for Spanish next semester.

Frank's choice of Spanish as a second language to learn could be described as a “default” choice, as he explains: “I began studying Spanish in grade 11 after deciding

that I was no longer interested in studying French.” Frank relates the fact that he decided to “give up” French and take on Spanish with the fact that Spanish was “never forced” upon him and that he has “always had more of an attraction to the Spanish culture.”

When comparing Spanish with French and English, Frank refers to the syntactic and semantic components of the languages: in Spanish there are “far fewer exceptions to rules” than in French; the many cognates in Spanish and English facilitate comprehension of new vocabulary; often “sentence construction is the same” in French and Spanish. These features make Spanish “relatively easy” to learn. In terms of skills, speaking in Spanish is “much harder” than writing because of its spontaneous nature: “When speaking, one has to make quick decisions and does not have as much time as when writing.” Listening to Spanish speakers in authentic communicative contexts may be difficult because of accents and because “oftentimes the speaker speaks too quickly.”

Frank considers himself a successful learner of Spanish because he is “fairly proficient” in the language. Frank describes higher proficiency as being characterised by thinking in Spanish, not having to rely on translation, and having a lot of vocabulary. He also relates success to a feeling of progress: “As each day goes by I feel that my abilities in Spanish are only improving.” In his view, language learning requires “consistent practice” and “a lot of time.” He attributes his success in Spanish to “constant practice” provided by “the nightly assigned exercises from class.” Frank emphasises the importance of focusing on language structure and of repetition and accuracy in language learning. He refers, for example to the “conventions” of the Spanish language, and uses terms such as “reinforcement,” “repetition,” “drilling.”

Frank believes that a “keen understanding of grammar” is, “one of the most important aspects” of studying Spanish. He notes that “people will argue that the most effective way to learn the language is to speak and to communicate with others,” but he considers that it is most effective to “study grammar intensely, while practicing conversation.” He emphasises the importance of mastering grammar in producing comprehensible, accurate output: “If one does not have a firm grasp on the conventions of the language, then communicating and forming coherent sentences will definitely be an issue.”

Frank focuses on the role of translation in language learning and on accuracy. He believes that translating from L1 is “a major component of studying a language.” However, he also believes that Spanish learners with a high proficiency “think in Spanish” and do not need to resort to translation. He considers important “avoiding mistakes from the beginning.” At a basic language learning level, “one takes in the most new information,” and therefore “it is vital to put in a lot of effort” at this stage. Errors may be caused by “translation that is too direct” or “word-by-word translation” and interferences between Spanish and French. In the context of communicating with native speakers, Frank believes that “one cannot be afraid to make mistakes when speaking aloud” and advocates for communicating in the language “no matter how poor one’s knowledge of it is,” because learners can learn from these mistakes and “start thinking in the language.” However, in the questionnaire he strongly disagreed with the statement “If I heard someone speaking Spanish, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.” Frank explained that feeling “inhibited” or “intimidated” speaking Spanish may “slow down” progress. At the same time, native speakers are a

model of proper Spanish, and so communicating with them offers the opportunity to produce and listen to accurate spoken Spanish: “One should take advantage of every possible situation that they can find to hear proper Spanish and attempt to communicate with proper Spanish.”

Frank finds language learning as habit formation useful and highlights the importance of repetition and overlearning. For example, he sees academic tests as valuable in “evaluat[ing] how good one’s Spanish is,” helping learners monitor common mistakes, and avoiding “fossilizing” mistakes, as “it is hard to unlearn habits... committed to memory.” Frank relies on repetition through written exercises and laboratory practice to learn Spanish: “Repetition [is] good in drilling the concepts into my head.” Accordingly, in the questionnaire, he strongly agreed with the statement “It is important to practice in the language laboratory.”

Frank distinguishes between study of Spanish in an immersion and non-immersion context. He expresses the belief that immersion is appropriate at a more advanced level of proficiency, after formal language study. In order to learn the language “properly,” a learner “must study it fairly vigorously for about five years,” and then “immerse” in a Spanish-speaking country.

Profile of Kelly

Kelly’s questionnaire answers are presented in Table 3. The table is followed by a descriptive profile of her language learning beliefs.

Table 3. Kelly's questionnaire responses.

Dimension	Items					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other
1		3, 6	5, 24	28		4-C 14-E
2		34	1, 2, 10, 15	29, 32, 33	22	
3		8, 25	11	16, 20	26	
4	17, 21	13	7	9, 12, 18, 19		
5			23, 27, 30, 31			

Kelly is a second year student planning to major in French and possibly minor in Spanish. She registered in French and Spanish in her first semester at the university. She plans to continue studying Spanish throughout her university studies, regardless of whether or not she minors in it. She is currently taking university courses in Spanish, French, and Italian, and also completed two Latin courses. She would like to study German and Russian in the future. Although, in her questionnaire responses, Kelly neither agreed nor disagreed with all the statements related to motivation and expectations, her comments provided more specific insights into her beliefs. For example, she is “very interested” in foreign languages and believes that learning languages is important “for work, travel, and simply for personal development.” French and Spanish in particular are “very interesting and beneficial to learn” because French is one of Canada’s official languages and Spanish is important in the United States. Another reason why Kelly studies languages is that they “[come] fairly easy” to her in comparison with other subject areas such as science and mathematics.

Kelly emphasises her view that language learning requires “a lot of practise” and “a lot of time and dedication.” She focuses on time, effort, and interest as the main factors determining success. For example, she associates her success in learning Spanish with her continued time commitment to learning the language: “I have devoted and will continue to devote a lot of time to practising, reading, studying and attempting to understand the language.” Similarly, she argues: “It really depends how much time the student dedicates to learning the language how well they will speak and understand.” In terms of the time needed to learn Spanish, for university students, who have access to “many resources” such as language laboratories and cultural activities and regularly participate in them, “it would probably take a few years to learn the language well.” However, if someone was “completely immersed” in the language, they would learn “very quickly,” and “perhaps within a few months, they would be speaking Spanish quite well.”

Kelly considers that learning a language cannot be considered as “easy” or “hard” per se. She thinks that finding a language easy or hard depends on how “interested” in and “dedicated” to the language the learner is. To illustrate this point, she explains: “If you practise this language [Spanish] a lot, go to every class and are involved, then you will find it a lot easier than if you never look at your book, rarely go to class and rarely participate.” Furthermore, if a university learner of Spanish does not succeed, “time is the most likely reason.”

Kelly believes that, in comparison to English and French, Spanish is “much easier to learn,” because “the spelling and pronunciation are very similar.” However, in English and Spanish “sometimes this is not the case.” Knowledge of another romance language

assists learning Spanish because the learner might “see grammar patterns and word origin more easily.” She considers the production skills of speaking and writing in Spanish to be “on equal levels” in terms of their easiness or difficulty. When reading, she can go at her “own pace,” but listening in authentic contexts is comparatively harder: “I find many Spanish speakers to speak very fast! Sometimes I have a little (a lot!) of trouble following along.”

According to Kelly, in order to learn Spanish, it is important to spend “as much time as possible” “experienc[ing]” it as well as “immersing” in it. As an example of immersion in the language, she refers to practicing with cultural artefacts, for example by “watching television or reading newspapers.” However, Kelly does not believe that immersion in a Spanish-speaking country is “imperative” for learning the language, although “it certainly would enhance and hasten the learning process.”

In her questionnaire answers, Kelly disagreed with the statements “Learning Spanish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words” and “Learning Spanish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.” Although from those answers in isolation it would appear as if Kelly did not consider vocabulary and grammar important, her comments provided more specific information regarding her beliefs about the importance of vocabulary and grammar. Having a “really good vocabulary” is for Kelly the “most important” element of learning Spanish because it enables the learner to “talk to people about a much wider range of topics.” Grammar would come second in importance after vocabulary. Regarding practice in the language laboratory, she finds it “very beneficial” because “it relates to the topics from class.” She also finds repetitions

useful because, for example, they help “get[ting] used” to certain verb forms which then “come more naturally.” However, translating from the first language is ineffective.

Kelly also emphasises speaking skills. In general, she believes that in learning Spanish “making mistakes is not a big deal” because learners can learn from them and “the important thing is to try.” However, when commenting on the skill of speaking in particular, she believes that “speaking correctly is important,” although she does not believe that sounding like a native Spanish speaker is. For a beginner, just “trying to speak Spanish should be the focus.” Kelly refers to the importance of speaking with natives, arguing that this increases confidence in speaking. In her opinion, feeling “comfortable” will also allow learners to express themselves “more freely” and understand native interlocutors “more easily.”

Profile of Akram

Akram’s questionnaire answers are presented in Table 4. The table is followed by a descriptive profile of his language learning beliefs.

Table 4. Akram’s questionnaire responses.

Dimension	Items					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other
1	3, 28	6	24	5		4-C 14-D
2	1, 34	15	32, 33	22, 2	10, 29	
3	11, 26	25	8	16, 20		
4	17	7, 13, 18, 19	21, 12		9	
5	23, 31	27		30		

Akram is a second year student majoring in Biochemistry with a double minor in Spanish and Chemistry. Akram's first languages are English and Arabic and he has lived in Canada for four years. He studied Afrikaans as a second language for six years at school. He is in his second semester of Spanish language studies. He considers himself successful at learning Spanish because he has made "a lot of progress" since he started studying the language at the university level eleven months ago. He compares his knowledge of Spanish with his knowledge of other languages stating: "From experience in learning new languages, my progress [in Spanish] is well ahead of my performance in other languages I have learned." Akram describes the importance of the language in terms of Spanish being one of the top three languages in the world and "unofficially" the second language in the United States. He thinks that Spanish will be a "bonus for getting a job" in the United States, where he plans to live and possibly study.

Akram refers to his progress in Spanish as being "quite impressive" to him. He relates his success with the fact that Spanish grammar is "very simple" compared to the other languages he knows, and that "a lot of the vocabulary is similar to English." He believes that Spanish is in general a "relatively easy language for anyone to learn," especially with knowledge of other romance languages. He finds that the grammar rules of Spanish are "much easier" because they have "fewer exceptions and irregularities" than in other languages.

Akram relates the fact that in the classroom context the focus has been on reading and writing with finding these skills "a lot easier" than speaking or listening: "I learn the grammar of the language more than I listen to or practice it." Accordingly, in the questionnaire he strongly agreed with the statement "It is easier to read and write Spanish

than to speak and understand it.” He also comments that in Canada he hasn’t had “any opportunity to practice using the language,” which makes it more difficult to learn. According to Akram, it would “probably take three or four years” for him to learn Spanish in a non-immersion environment, where there is not “a lot of opportunity” to practice. In contrast, in an immersion setting it would take him “anywhere from one to two years” to learn the language “well enough to communicate without difficulty,” although he argues that it is possible to learn to communicate in Spanish without immersion.

In the questionnaire, Akram agreed with the item “I feel self-conscious speaking Spanish in front of other people.” However, he explains that “taking advantage of every opportunity to practice with a Spanish speaker” is the most important aspect of learning to communicate in Spanish. In fact, he refers to achieving communicative competence in Spanish as his goal: “I am learning Spanish to be able to communicate with others, and not to study the language as a ‘science.’” In this regard, he does not find practice in the language laboratory to be “all that effective” because it is not authentic: “I am not physically practicing the language with someone else in a general conversation, but rather with set phrases that the book provides.” In contrast, learning “common phrases that are used everyday” enhances the learner’s ability to communicate.

While Akram focuses on the role of interaction with others in learning Spanish, he also focuses on grammatical competence. In his view, the “mechanics” of a language along with vocabulary are important because they “provide a base for communicating in that language.” He also considers that vocabulary is “probably the most important part of learning a language.” When referring to the advantages of speaking with native speakers

in terms of achieving grammatical competence, Akram refers to grammatical competence in particular: “Practicing with a Spanish speaker covers the pronunciation aspect as well as the grammatical aspect of learning to communicate.”

Profile of Sarah

Sarah’s questionnaire answers are presented in Table 5. The table is followed by a descriptive profile of her language learning beliefs.

Table 5. Sarah’s questionnaire responses.

Dimension	Items					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other
1	3, 28	6	4	24		4-C 14-C
2	10, 32, 34	1, 15	2, 22, 33		29	
3	11, 25	8	20		16, 26	
4	17, 18	21, 7	13, 19	9, 12		
5	23, 27, 31			30		

Sarah is a third year Biology student planning to minor in Spanish and History. She “developed a passion for languages” during high school, where she studied Expanded Core French. At the university level, the only language she is studying is Spanish. After her degree, however, Sarah plans on “taking time” to study more languages. She is learning Spanish to work in the United States, where being bilingual would make her more employable. Sarah’s choice of language was motivated by her appeal of South American music and culture as well as the fact that she perceived she could learn Spanish

“without much difficulty” because of its similarities with French. Additionally, the language had an aesthetic appeal for her: “Spanish was always my favourite language to listen to.” She started learning Spanish because she wanted to continue studying a language but “didn’t want to continue with French after high school.”

Sarah believes that, in general, it is easier for someone who knows a romance language to learn Spanish, and that some people would find languages easier than other subjects because some people “are naturally inclined towards certain subject areas.” She also thinks that Spanish is a “fairly easy” language to learn, mostly because “the grammar rules have few exceptions.” In comparison with French, for example, Spanish has a “simplified” grammar. Sarah finds it “much easier” to read and write than to listen and speak in Spanish, because, in her view, reading and writing “just require memorization of vocabulary and grammar.”

Sarah studied French since grade four but discontinued her study of French after high school to start Spanish. She describes her early experiences with French in school as positive. When she refers to learning French in Expanded Core French, Sarah focuses on self-esteem: she “enjoyed learning other languages” because mastering another language made her “good about [herself]” and “smart.” She also enjoyed “learning about other cultures and destinations.” However, a feeling of lack of success when she received poor grades in her last year of high school made her feel “discouraged.” As a result, she “discontinued” French studies and decided to “learn Spanish instead.” However, she now regrets having dropped French.

Although Sarah considers Spanish easy to learn, she identifies oral skills as an area of difficulty. In particular, she emphasises the challenge of becoming a fluent speaker of

Spanish. In the questionnaire, she strongly agreed with the statement “It is easier to read and write Spanish than to speak and understand it.” She considers that speaking and listening are more difficult than writing and reading because, in order to speak and listen, it is necessary “to think in the language,” and she is “not able to do that yet.” Sarah finds that learners need to take advantage of opportunities to “speak aloud,” because this will help “learn to think in Spanish without translating,” and that it is important to understand Spanish “as you encounter it, without having to take time for literal translations.”

Although Spanish is in general “much easier” than French, Sarah affirms that she had no difficulty speaking in French, while she finds speaking in Spanish challenging. She attributes this difficulty to the fact that she does not have the opportunity to speak Spanish outside the classroom. In that sense, Sarah considers speaking with native speakers “very important” because it helps “reinforce proper pronunciation” and “pick up various accents and more vocabulary.” At the same time, she finds speaking with native speakers challenging, and in the questionnaire she strongly agreed with the statement “I feel self-conscious speaking Spanish in front of other people.” Sarah also believes that feeling self-conscious may prevent learners from “tak[ing] advantage of more opportunities to use the language.” Additionally, not only speaking with native speakers, but also being understood by them may be challenging, because speaking with an English accent may “impede comprehension by the native speaker.” Sarah believes that immersion would facilitate learning Spanish. Whereas learning the language well would require “a few years of in-class teaching” in a non-immersion setting, it would only take “a few months to a year” to learn it in an immersion setting. In Sarah’s view, immersion

would “definitely be the best way to learn,” although it is also possible to learn Spanish in a non-immersion setting.

Apart from considering the need to pay attention to speaking skills because it is difficult to develop them, Sarah also concentrates on the importance of mastering vocabulary and grammar and of avoiding errors. In her opinion, learning vocabulary is “most important” because “words are the basis of the language.” Additionally, grammar is “necessary for forming coherent sentences.” Errors need to be avoided or “brought to your attention as soon as possible” because “mistakes may become bad habits.”

Sarah relates her success in leaning Spanish with effort and motivation. She considers herself a successful Spanish learner because she works “hard” and affirms having a “strong desire” to learn Spanish. Sarah emphasises the importance of motivation by stating that “the best language learners want to learn more than anything.”

Profile of Jennifer

Jennifer’s questionnaire answers are presented in Table 6. The table is followed by a descriptive profile of her language learning beliefs.

Table 6. Jennifer’s questionnaire responses.

Dimension	Items					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other
1	6	3	24	5	28	4-D 14-E
2	15, 34	1, 10	2, 29, 32, 33		22	
3		16, 20, 25, 26	11		8	

4	17, 13, 19		7	21, 12, 18	9	
5	27, 31	23		30		

Jennifer is a second year student majoring in French and possibly also in Spanish. She may also take university German courses. She learned Spanish “informally” when she was in grade 10 and has been studying it in a classroom setting since her last year of high school. She is studying Spanish to “complement future studies of public relations.” She identifies herself as successful because of her commitment to devoting time to learning the language. Additionally, she has experienced a “growing interest” not only in the language but also its culture, but regrets that Spanish seems not to “carry so much importance” in Canada as in the United States and finds little support for the teaching of Spanish at the high school and university level in Atlantic Canada. Jennifer also considers herself successful because she enjoys languages: “I can’t say there is a language I don’t like.” She further relates success with the ability to communicate with native speakers in a Spanish-speaking environment: “I know I can express myself in a Spanish environment, given the opportunity, as I have, volunteering with a Spanish family and visiting Spain.” All of these factors make Jennifer feel “confident” in saying that she is a successful learner of Spanish. However, she states that her abilities in Spanish are not “perfect or even close in any way.”

Jennifer believes that Spanish is “one of the easiest languages” she knows because it is “very much written as it is spoken,” and there are “pretty general” grammar rules. She finds Spanish easier than French in terms of pronunciation. To illustrate that “anyone can learn the language,” she relates the experience of a friend who knows little Spanish but

can sound “very good” by keeping in mind the “simple rule” for Spanish of “pronouncing all of the vowel sounds.” She believes that knowledge of “any romance languages” assists in learning Spanish.

Jennifer finds it “easier” to speak and write than to listen and read, maybe because she is “more interested in that,” although she expresses awareness that language learning involves different skills: “I should really do more to help improve all aspects of my learning experience.” In her opinion, learning Spanish well “wouldn’t take too long” and “the main aspect” is to acquire a “fairly large and round” vocabulary and to be “exposed” to spoken Spanish. Grammar is important because it helps to produce comprehensible output, to “express yourself much more clearly.” Jennifer’s questionnaire answers also reflected her belief in the importance of vocabulary and grammar. She thinks that translation word-by-word is ineffective and that making errors is not important because she can learn from them and “practice makes perfect.” Jennifer finds repetition “the best learning technique” for her. For example, when she wants to learn something important to her in the lab, she finds it useful to “repeat it many times.” Jennifer also emphasises the importance of practicing the oral skills of speaking and listening. For example, she believes that learning grammatical items such as irregular verbs can be achieved “fairly quickly” through “get[ting] used to hearing” them.

According to Jennifer, learning Spanish well would take “maybe three years” with no other exposure than “school education,” whereas it would only take one year in a Spanish-speaking environment. Jennifer clearly differentiates formal language learning, or learning in a classroom setting, from informal language learning. For example, when she refers to her first experiences learning Spanish, she mentions that she “had a feel” for

the language “though not formally” when she met Hispanic people through a friend two years before she started high school Spanish. Jennifer emphasises the key role of informal experiences in her learning of Spanish, particularly in terms of her socio-cultural interactions with native speakers and appeal for cultural artefacts such as music: “I’ve learned a few ways informally, volunteering, friends, travel, music... they have all been a HUGE aspect in my learning.” In fact, she explains that she started learning Spanish because she was attracted to Hispanic music and Hispanic friends “introduced” Spanish to her. She was motivated to begin studying more of the language “as a sign of respect” to her friends. Learning languages is also appealing for her because it is considered “cool” among her friends.

In the questionnaire, Jennifer strongly disagreed with the statement “It is necessary to know the culture of Spanish-speaking countries in order to speak Spanish.” However, she considers that, when learning a language, both language and cultural competence are important, because of “the important aspects and values that generally lay within that language-culture.” The fact that knowledge of languages is important for her social interactions is emphasised by the following comment: “As long as I have time and have friends who speak the language I will continue to study Spanish.” Similarly, Jennifer stresses the importance of learning languages in that it “is definitely a way to learn about yourself and about others.” Despite her emphasis on cultural competence as being related to language learning, Jennifer believes that learning in a Spanish-speaking environment is not “important” or “essential.”

In the questionnaire Jennifer disagreed with the statement “If I heard someone speaking Spanish, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.”

Although she has had various experiences interacting with native speakers of Spanish, she still finds that she is not completely confident speaking the language: “Often times I find myself speaking Spanish only with those whom I am comfortable with.” However, Jennifer exhibits self-reinforcement and self-efficacy beliefs. For example, she has overcome the difficulty of not understanding all input in Spanish by guessing meaning from context, and expresses the usefulness of this strategy in the following terms: “Guessing... you can feel good about yourself instead of dwelling on the parts that you don’t know.” She has resolved that she needs to “get over” her difficulty in speaking with Spanish speakers.

Profile of Richard

Richard’s questionnaire answers are presented in Table 7. The table is followed by a descriptive profile of his language learning beliefs.

Table 7. Richard’s questionnaire responses.

Dimension	Items					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other
1	6	3	5, 24, 28			4-D 14-C
2	10, 15	34	32, 33	1, 2	22, 29	
3	11	25	20	8	16, 26	
4	17, 7, 12, 13			9, 19	21, 18	
5	23, 31	27, 30				

Richard is a History major in his fourth year at university. He has “always been interested in other languages” and has learned French, Spanish, Finnish, Mandarin, Croatian, and German through a combination of self-teaching, private classes, and formal courses. With regard to his knowledge of Spanish, he describes himself as having “learned the language well.” In relation to his success, he refers to his experiences with speaking and listening to the language in authentic contexts, such as the following: “I [watch] movies in Spanish—with either English or Spanish subtitles to help me understand words I don’t know or accents I’m not used to.” He also refers to speaking Spanish with Spanish friends. He believes that his success with the language relates to a prolonged and consistent practice that has involved “speaking and using [Spanish] for many years” and “almost every day.” Finally, his success also relates to his comfort and confidence level with the language as he explains: “I find that I can just speak in Spanish regarding most things that come to mind with the same ease that I speak English.”

Richard thinks that Spanish is “easy for an English speaker to learn.” This is because of two reasons: “The grammar [of English and Spanish] is similar,” and “many of the words are cognates.” In comparison to French or German, Spanish is “easier to learn” because of the “similarities” between English and Spanish. He considers writing easier than reading as he finds editing easy. In order to explain why writing is easier than reading for him, he refers to teaching methodology, arguing that “writing is “the main way that we practice, i.e. exercises in textbooks.”

Richard focuses on his autonomy as a language learner. He affirms: “I hate the audio labs and the activities my profs make me do in those horrible exercise books.” With respect to grammar and vocabulary, he considers them important to be able to

“communicate a wide variety of ideas,” and also emphasises his autonomous approach to them by stating: “I always learn the grammar and vocabulary on my own.” In fact, Richard believes that it is possible to learn a language without formal classes in a classroom context. He contrasts authentic and inauthentic language learning, arguing that practice in the language laboratory “can never duplicate the benefits of interacting with a native speaker” and it does not “mirror the complexity or the speed of everyday conversation.” In the questionnaire, he also strongly disagreed with the statement “It is important to practice in the language laboratory.” He finds authentic practice more motivating and enjoyable. For practicing, he speaks with native speakers, watches movies, and uses the Internet. These types of practice are appealing to him because there is an element of choice involved. For example, he can talk about topics relevant to him when speaking to someone in Spanish and he only watches the Spanish movies he is interested in.

Richard emphasises that “above all one must practice SPEAKING” when learning Spanish. He refers to interactions with native speakers as “the best practice for maintaining [his] Spanish-speaking skills.” He believes errors are natural and is not afraid of making errors when speaking: “If I realize I’ve made a mistake, I just correct myself and carry on speaking.” He describes himself as being a fluent speaker of Spanish and feeling comfortable speaking the language: “I can just speak in Spanish regarding most things that come to mind with the same ease that I speak English.” In fact, in the questionnaire he strongly disagreed with the statement “I feel self-conscious speaking Spanish in front of other people.” Richard also describes his ability to think in Spanish in

the following terms: “I find that the words themselves are now taking on meaning in my head on their own... It’s as if I understand the words for what they are in Spanish.”

Although Richard places emphasis on interacting with native speakers, he believes that “it’s not necessary to learn Spanish in a Spanish-speaking country.” In fact, he describes having participated in a French immersion experience four years ago and having “forgotten plenty.” Language learning is for him a matter of “constant revision and practice, no matter where you get it.” He believes that immersion after formal study is useful, and that in a non-Spanish-speaking environment it could take “about two years or three” to learn the language.

For Richard, cultural knowledge is not essential. He refers in particular to having historical knowledge of Spanish-speaking countries as not being related to language skills: “I don’t see how knowing the year when Ferdinand and Isabel united Castilla and Aragon helps me speak better Spanish.” However, “learning history/culture when it’s taught in Spanish helps as an interesting means of practice.”

Profile of Stephanie

Stephanie’s questionnaire answers are presented in Table 8. The table is followed by a descriptive profile of her language learning beliefs.

Table 8. Stephanie’s questionnaire responses.

Dimension	Items					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Other
1	3	5	6, 24, 28			4-C 14-C
2	10, 34	1, 15	2, 32, 33	22	29	
3		8, 11		16, 20, 25, 26		
4	17	21, 7, 18, 19	12, 13		9	
5	31	23, 30	27			

Stephanie is a first year student intending to major in Education. She has been studying Spanish for three years. Her motivation for learning Spanish is intrinsic. She is learning it “simply out of interest,” as she explains: “I’m learning it as a hobby. I don’t expect to live or work in any Hispanic cultures-I just enjoy the language.” She also hopes to “pass the language on” to her children. She felt attracted to Spanish through music: “The music was so rhythmic and as I am a dancer I love it!” In turn, the music made her interested in Hispanic culture in general: “Initially, it was music that caught my attention and it grew to the entire culture.” Her first experience learning Spanish was in high school when she practiced oral Spanish with an English as a second language student from Colombia attending the same high school. She has had positive experiences with the Hispanic people she has met, all of whom have been “wonderful” people. In contrast with Spanish, Stephanie has “never found French very interesting.” She contrasts her experiences with French and Spanish in terms of enjoyment, success, and interest: “As a child, I tried to learn French but I never enjoyed it nor was I very successful at it... because I was not interested.”

Stephanie identifies herself as a successful Spanish learner for a variety of reasons. She has “learnt much about both the language and the culture.” She also relates success to achievement in formal examinations; however, she remarks, “there have been exceptions.” Additionally, she neither agreed nor disagreed with the questionnaire item “I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak Spanish very well.” Stephanie further specifies that her success in Spanish is dependent on how much time and effort she devotes to it: “When I put the time and effort into learning this language I get a lot out of it.” She also believes that her “drive and success” come from her “love and interest” of Spanish and the Hispanic culture. She associates her success with having “always been interested” in Spanish.

Stephanie finds “hardest” to speak and listen to Spanish, whereas writing and reading are easier because “you can take time to understand what is written or what you are trying to say.” However, when speaking, you are “put on the spot,” which makes it harder to “think and translate” at the same time. In her opinion, she is “not very good at speaking on the spot.” Accordingly, in the questionnaire, she agreed with the statement “I feel self-conscious speaking Spanish in front of other people.” She finds listening difficult when practicing with recordings because people in them “speak too fast to understand what they’re saying and you can’t slow them down,” whereas in a conversation you can ask your interlocutor to “slow down.” Stephanie affirms that she does not find it difficult to understand what she calls “live” Spanish.

For Stephanie, Spanish has been “relatively easy” to learn because of her background in French, which has made learning Spanish “a little easier than learning French.” The grammar reminds her “a lot” of French and “there are many areas that you

can compare” in the two languages. As well, the Spanish alphabet is “almost identical” to the English alphabet. Stephanie also believes that “the more languages you learn, the easier it is to pick up a new one as they are all related.” Therefore, the time it would take someone to learn Spanish well depends on the number of languages known.

Stephanie relates language learning skills with learning skills in general. She thinks that “previous skills... provide you with skills to approach the language better.” In the same way as “learning basic math skills can help you problem solve rationally later in your life,” previous education “plays a role in learning a language.” She also explains that the different components of language learning are related and form a whole: “Learning Spanish is mostly about a combination of learning the culture, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. They come as one package.” In her view, grammar and vocabulary are “equally important” and “necessary as a package to communicate.” She stresses that grammar is important, even in the first language, in order to “communicate effectively.” Some aspects of Spanish grammar, such as its two past tenses, are difficult, and that is why “more importance is placed on grammar in the Spanish language.” Cultural knowledge of Spanish-speaking countries is not as important as vocabulary and grammar.

Stephanie finds “a lot of repetition and practise with grammar exercises in the multimedia lab” useful because they make her “more comfortable with the material” and help “remember it better.” As well, she uses “charts and lists.” She identifies herself as a visual learner: “If I forget I can visualize the list and locate the word or verb I’m looking for in my mind.” Guessing is effective only to a certain point because “you can pick up bad habits.” She believes that having “the proper pronunciations” when speaking is

important because otherwise there may be confusions with similar sounding words that have different meanings. However, she also thinks that “it’s nearly impossible to avoid making mistakes when learning to communicate in a new language.” It is “ok” to make errors “as long as you fix them” and learn from them.

Summary

This chapter presented profiles of the beliefs of the study’s eight participants. We created the profiles based on questionnaire answers, as well as on analysis of answers to the two open-ended items added to the questionnaire, online discussion prompts, and individual online interview questions.

Margaret is a second year student working on a major in Linguistics and German and a minor in Spanish. She has studied multiple languages formally and informally. She considers Spanish “by far the easiest language” in comparison with other languages. She particularly enjoys oral communication in Spanish and finds the language “a lot of fun to speak.” In high school, neither her experiences with French or Spanish were positive, but she continued learning Spanish. Margaret’s enjoyment of Spanish as opposed to French relates to contact with the Spanish culture and native speakers and her intrinsic motivation to learn Spanish.

Margaret highlights her experiences with native speakers of Spanish and her comfort in speaking the language, but does not consider herself “a fluent speaker.” She also highlights the importance of the syntactic and semantic components of Spanish in producing comprehensible output. She distinguishes between learning Spanish formally

and informally and describes autonomous ways in which she practices listening as an alternative to less authentic practice in a formal setting.

Frank is a second year student doing a major in Biochemistry and a minor in History. He spent three weeks in Spain enrolled in a Spanish course. This experience motivated him to study the language and culture. He intends to study the language “independently” if he cannot register for Spanish next semester. Frank’s choice of Spanish as a second language to learn could be described as a “default” choice, as he chose Spanish as an alternative to French.

Frank considers himself a successful learner of Spanish because he is “fairly proficient” in the language. He also relates success to a feeling of progress. Frank emphasises the importance of focusing on language structure and of repetition and accuracy. For example, he uses terms such as “reinforcement,” “repetition,” “drilling.” He also focuses on the role of translation in language learning. He distinguishes between study of Spanish in an immersion and non-immersion context, and believes that immersion is appropriate at a more advanced level of proficiency, after formal language study.

Kelly is a second year student planning to major in French and possibly minor in Spanish. She plans to continue studying Spanish throughout her university studies, regardless of whether or not she minors in it. She is “very interested” in foreign languages and believes that learning languages is important “for work, travel, and simply for personal development.” Kelly focuses on time, effort, and interest as the main factors determining success in language learning.

Kelly believes that, in order to learn Spanish, it is important to spend “as much time as possible” “experienc[ing]” it as well as “immersing” in it. As an example of immersion in the language, she refers to practicing with cultural artefacts. However, Kelly does not believe that immersion in a Spanish-speaking country is “imperative” for learning the language. In general, she believes that in learning Spanish “making mistakes is not a big deal” because learners can learn from them. Kelly refers to the importance of speaking with natives, arguing that this increases confidence in speaking.

Akram is a second year student majoring in Biochemistry with a double minor in Spanish and Chemistry. His first languages are English and Arabic, and he studied Afrikaans at school. He considers himself successful at learning Spanish because he has made “a lot of progress” since he started studying the language at the university level. Akram describes the importance of the language in terms of Spanish being one of the top three languages in the world and “unofficially” the second language in the United States. His progress in Spanish is “quite impressive” to him. He relates his success with the fact that Spanish grammar is “very simple” compared to other languages, and that “a lot of the vocabulary is similar to English.” He finds that the grammar rules of Spanish have “fewer exceptions and irregularities” than in other languages.

Akram relates the fact that, in the classroom context, the focus has been on reading and writing. He notes that these skills are “a lot easier” than speaking or listening. He explains that “taking advantage of every opportunity to practice with a Spanish speaker” is the most important aspect of learning to communicate in Spanish. He refers to achieving communicative competence in Spanish as his goal. In this regard, he does not

find practice in the language laboratory effective because it is not authentic. While he focuses on interaction with others in learning Spanish, he also focuses on grammar.

Sarah is a third year Biology student planning to minor in Spanish and History. She “developed a passion for languages” during high school, where she studied Expanded Core French. She is learning Spanish to work in the United States. Her choice of language was motivated by her appeal of South American music and culture as well as the fact that she perceived she could learn Spanish “without much difficulty” because of its similarities with French. Additionally, the language had an aesthetic appeal for her. Sarah believes that Spanish is “fairly easy” to learn, because “the grammar rules have few exceptions.”

Sarah studied French since grade four but discontinued her study of French after high school to start Spanish. A feeling of lack of success when she received poor grades in her last year of high school made her feel “discouraged.” However, she now regrets having dropped French. Although Sarah considers Spanish easy to learn, she identifies oral skills as an area of difficulty. She attributes her difficulty in speaking in Spanish to the fact that she does not have the opportunity to speak it outside the classroom. In Sarah’s view, immersion would “definitely be the best way to learn,” although it is also possible to learn Spanish in a non-immersion setting. Sarah also concentrates on the importance of mastering vocabulary and grammar and of avoiding errors.

Jennifer is a second year student majoring in French and possibly also in Spanish. She learned Spanish “informally” when she was in grade 10 and has been studying it in a classroom setting since her last year of high school. She identifies herself as successful because of her commitment to devoting time to learning the language and her enjoyment

of languages. She further relates success with the ability to communicate with native speakers, and emphasises the importance of practicing speaking and listening. Jennifer finds repetition “the best learning technique” for her.

Jennifer clearly differentiates formal language learning from informal language learning. She emphasises the key role of informal experiences in her learning of Spanish, particularly in terms of her socio-cultural interactions with native speakers and appeal for cultural artefacts such as music. However, she finds that she is not completely confident speaking the language. She considers that, when learning a language, both language and cultural competence are important, but believes that learning in a Spanish-speaking environment is not “important” or “essential.”

Richard is a History major in his fourth year at university. He has learned French, Spanish, Finnish, Mandarin, Croatian, and German through a combination of self-teaching, private classes, and formal courses. In relation to his success, he refers to his experiences with speaking and listening to the language in authentic contexts. He also refers to speaking Spanish with Spanish friends. He believes that his success with the language relates to a prolonged and consistent practice that has involved “speaking and using [Spanish] for many years” and “almost every day.” His success also relates to his comfort and confidence level with the language. He considers writing in Spanish easier than reading, and argues that “writing is “the main way that we practice, i.e. exercises in textbooks.”

Richard focuses on his autonomy as a language learner. He finds authentic practice motivating and enjoyable. He speaks with native speakers, watches movies, and uses the Internet. He refers to interactions with native speakers as “the best practice for

maintaining [his] Spanish-speaking skills.” He believes errors are natural and is not afraid of making errors when speaking. Although Richard places emphasis on interacting with native speakers, he believes that “it’s not necessary to learn Spanish in a Spanish-speaking country.”

Stephanie is a first year student intending to major in Education. She is learning Spanish “simply out of interest.” She also hopes to “pass the language on” to her children. She felt attracted to Spanish through music. She contrasts her experiences with French and Spanish in terms of enjoyment, success, and interest. For Stephanie, Spanish has been “relatively easy” to learn because of her background in French. She finds “hardest” to speak and listen to Spanish, whereas writing and reading are easier.

Stephanie believes that grammar and vocabulary are “equally important” and “necessary as a package to communicate.” Cultural knowledge of Spanish-speaking countries is not as important as vocabulary and grammar. She finds “a lot of repetition and practise with grammar exercises in the multimedia lab” useful. She believes that having “the proper pronunciations” when speaking is important because otherwise there may be confusions with similar sounding words that have different meanings. However, she also thinks that “it’s nearly impossible to avoid making mistakes when learning to communicate in a new language.” However, she believes that errors can be a source of learning.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings organised as individual profiles of the language learners. The profiles highlighted the language learners' beliefs in relation to the five dimensions of the BALLI. In this chapter, we cross-analyze the profiles to identify commonalities as well as differences between beliefs. The comparison is organised into sections corresponding to the five BALLI dimensions which were used to frame the data collection as follows: (1) the difficulty of language learning; (2) foreign language aptitude; (3) the nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; and (5) motivations and expectations. Each section begins with a cross-case comparison of the results of the online questionnaire. For further reference, Appendix H presents tabular questionnaire results for the 34 BALLI items in a format allowing for viewing comparisons between individuals. After the comparison of questionnaire results, each section presents a more in-depth cross-case comparison of beliefs based on the analysis of data collected through the items added to the questionnaire, the online discussion, as well as the individual online interviews.

Following the cross-analyses, we consider the findings in relation to the concepts and theories outlined in Chapter two and the studies reviewed in Chapter three. We then present conclusions. These are followed by implications for the teaching of Spanish at the post-secondary level and some hypotheses that might be investigated in future studies.

The Difficulty of Language Learning

All participants shared the belief that some languages are easier to learn than others. They considered Spanish to be, either an easy language to learn, or a language of only medium difficulty. Not surprisingly, all but one participant, Stephanie, believed that they will ultimately learn to speak Spanish very well. There was less agreement between participants about how long it would take to become fluent. Likewise, there was less agreement about whether or not Spanish is structured like English. Three participants were neither in agreement nor disagreement with that statement, three disagreed with it, and two agreed with it. The majority of participants disagreed with the statement that it is easier to speak Spanish than to understand it. Two individuals, Kelly and Jennifer, did not believe that it is easier to read and write Spanish than to speak and understand it. Three individuals strongly agreed with that statement, and yet another three were undecided.

Participants were in a position to compare learning Spanish with other second or foreign languages because they all had experience with other languages. French was the main language that participants were able to reference, as, except for Akram, they had studied it in school. However, other languages with which they were able to compare included German and Russian. Spanish was considered easier to learn than other languages. Participants identified the similarities of Spanish, especially in terms of cognates, with French and English, and believed that Spanish had fewer grammatical exceptions than other languages such as English.

With regard to French in particular, participants referred to the similarities of French and Spanish in terms of grammar, syntax, spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary. They

also pointed out that knowledge of French and other Romance languages facilitated learning Spanish. However, Frank and Jennifer considered grammar, pronunciation, and speaking to be easier in Spanish. More importantly, participants held negative beliefs about learning French, except for Kelly, who considered learning French important, and Sarah, who regretted not continuing with it at university. For example, Margaret, Frank, Sarah, and Stephanie referred to having discontinued the study of French, using terms such as “quitting” or “giving up,” even though three of them planned to study other languages. Margaret, Frank, and Sarah had even decided to learn Spanish as an alternative to French. This discontinuance was not because they considered Spanish easier than French. Participants related their discontinuance of French to negative beliefs about French, the francophone culture, and its cultural artefacts, as well as to negative previous learning experiences. Those beliefs included aesthetic displeasure, lack of enjoyment, or interest in French. Previous negative experiences related to lack of a sense of achievement and progress in school (e.g. poor grades), lack of motivation because French was compulsory, and ineffective teaching practices. The only exception was Kelly, who had continued studying French and intended to major in it.

The individual profiles highlighted the ease of learning Spanish as compared to other languages. The profiles also highlighted the ease and difficulty of learning Spanish in formal versus informal or didactic versus authentic contexts. These authentic contexts were those in which there were opportunities for using the language with native speakers, yet did not necessarily or exclusively involve living or studying in Spanish-speaking countries. For example, Margaret, Jennifer, and Richard referred to their current experiences of Spanish immersion with native local Spanish speakers. The authentic

contexts were portrayed as easier settings in terms of time for learning Spanish. However, they were also portrayed as more difficult in terms of the demands for speaking and listening in a natural setting with native Spanish speakers. The speed of spoken Spanish combined with the unrehearsed nature of the interaction was described as challenging. Writing and reading skills presented less of a challenge because these skills had been emphasised in the classroom. However, for Richard, Margaret, and Jennifer, who reported using Spanish frequently outside the classroom context, speaking or listening did not present special difficulties.

Beliefs related to personal motivational and affective factors were more prominent than beliefs about the ease or difficulty of learning Spanish. For example, participants emphasised their enjoyment of and attraction to the target language and its culture. They also concentrated on the need to devote effort and time to language learning. However, cognitive ease in learning Spanish or other languages was not their major focus. In fact, they were interested in learning languages which they found more difficult than Spanish and referred to enjoying learning those languages. Additionally, they were less motivated to learn French than Spanish, although they did not find French more difficult. Rather than simply believing that the Spanish language was in itself easy to learn, participants believed that their personal effort and dedication made easier and facilitated the learning process. Furthermore, they described their enjoyment of the language and attraction to its culture as having had an influence in their choice of Spanish and their initial desire to learn Spanish. They also described their enjoyment of and attraction to Spanish as influencing their continued interest in the language and its culture, and their eventual success in learning the language.

Foreign Language Aptitude

All participants shared the belief that everyone can learn to speak Spanish. All except for two individuals, Richard and Kelly, also shared the belief that it is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language. Also, with the exception of two participants, Margaret and Kelly, they believed that it is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one. Participants did not believe that people who are good at math and science are not good at learning Spanish, except for Jennifer, who neither agreed nor disagreed with the corresponding statement in the questionnaire. No one expressed the belief that women are better than men at learning Spanish. With respect to participants' belief in their own aptitude for learning Spanish, all agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have foreign language aptitude," except for Kelly, who neither agreed nor disagreed with it. Participants' agreement with that statement was predictable, given that participants were recruited on the basis of the perception of themselves as successful Spanish learners.

Four individuals disagreed with the statement that some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn Spanish whereas the other four neither agreed nor disagreed. Most participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements that people who speak more than one language well are very intelligent and that Canadians are good at learning foreign or second languages.

Those who had previous or current experiences in communicating with native speakers on a regular basis highlighted the role of authentic experiences in their personal success in learning Spanish. This was the case in particular for Margaret, Jennifer, and Richard. When commenting on their success in learning Spanish, they tended to focus on

their personal contacts with native speakers and/or exposure to the language through cultural artefacts. They equated success in Spanish with the ability to communicate fluently with native speakers and to understand authentic language in the context of exposure to cultural artefacts such as movies and songs. In this regard, they defined success in Spanish in terms of having the ability to “successfully communicate” with native speakers, to “express” oneself in Spanish, and to “understand” spoken Spanish in conversations with native speakers and Spanish movies and music. They also referred to experiencing enjoyment in these activities. Other participants such as Akram, Sarah, Kelly, and Stephanie did not refer to having frequent personal contacts with native speakers frequently. However, they also believed in the importance of using the language to communicate with native speakers or referred to the use of and attraction to cultural artefacts related to the language.

Except for Frank, who emphasised error avoidance, and Sarah, who emphasised accuracy in speaking, participants did not focus on accuracy in relation to language learning success. On the contrary, Akram, Jennifer, and Richard, for example, defined success explicitly in terms of communicative abilities, which they opposed to being “perfect,” being completely “fluent,” and even to succeeding in formal examinations. Participants related success to “experiencing” and to “using” Spanish. This experience involved “immersing oneself” in both the language and its culture.

Participants also related success to personal progress and persistence in the language. Frank and Akram, for example, considered themselves successful Spanish learners because they believed that they had made progress in terms of the time spent learning the language as well as in terms of their knowledge of other languages.

Participants also described themselves as individuals who persisted in learning Spanish. They attributed their success to the following factors: regular practice; amount of time; amount of effort; and a desire, interest in, and enjoyment of learning the language which kept them motivated. They referred to the importance of devoting time to “learning,” “experiencing,” “using,” and “immersing” themselves in the language. They also considered themselves successful because they have spent years learning or using Spanish. They described “work[ing] hard” and being “dedicated” to learning the language. Another perceived factor contributing to success was a “desire” to learn Spanish, “interest” in Spanish, or “wanting to learn” the language. “Love” and “enjoyment” of Spanish were also associated with perceived success.

The Nature of Language Learning

Except for Stephanie, all individuals believed that learning Spanish is different from learning other school subjects. On the whole, participants did not believe that learning Spanish is a matter of learning vocabulary or grammar or of translating from one’s first language. For example, only Frank and Jennifer believed that learning Spanish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary. Likewise, only one individual, Jennifer, believed that learning Spanish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules. Regarding whether learning Spanish is mostly a matter of translating from one’s first language, six participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement, whereas Akram agreed with it, and Frank neither agreed nor disagreed. Five individuals believed that it is necessary to know the culture of Spanish-speaking countries in order to speak Spanish. However, Akram neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement, Richard

disagreed with it, and Jennifer strongly disagreed with it. Whereas five participants believed that it is better to learn Spanish in a Spanish-speaking country, Margaret, Kelly, and Jennifer expressed neither agreement nor disagreement with that statement.

Whereas from the questionnaire responses alone it may appear as if participants did not believe in the importance of grammar and vocabulary, their discussion and interview comments revealed a different type of belief regarding those components of language learning. In fact, all of the participants mentioned that grammar and vocabulary were important in learning Spanish. In particular, they specified that learning grammar and vocabulary facilitated the production of comprehensible output in the target language. Therefore, participants related learning grammar and vocabulary with a particular objective in learning Spanish, which was acquiring the abilities needed to communicate.

In contrast with grammar and vocabulary, translation played a comparatively less prominent role in participants' learning. Some of them believed that translation had only partial usefulness. For example, Akram saw translation as important but not essential, and Stephanie thought that it may be useful only at the basic level. In general, participants emphasised that relying on translation was an ineffective approach to learning the language. Only one participant, Frank, placed emphasis on translation as being effective in language learning, although, at the same time, he defined proficiency as not having to rely on translation.

Some participants referred to the value of having the opportunity to interact with native speakers and form personal bonds with them and their culture. Those bonds involved affective investment on the part of the learners in the language and its culture. In that sense, they emphasised the sociocultural component of language learning.

Participants often referred to those bonds in terms of “enjoyment” or “fun” in learning about the language and its culture. As well, they referred to having an affinity with Spanish speakers and their culture.

Whereas, in the questionnaire, five participants had indicated that it is better to learn Spanish in a Spanish-speaking country, in their discussion and interview comments, they were able to offer more nuanced explanations. These explanations revealed that they did not believe that practising the language in a Spanish-speaking country was essential, although they did believe in the general usefulness of this type of practice. Frank, Kelly, Akram, Sarah, Jennifer, and Richard explained that living or studying in a Spanish-speaking country is not essential. This belief may relate to participants’ references to informal, out-of-classroom learning contexts as those in which there are opportunities to interact with native speakers in authentic settings. They did not conceive of those contexts as necessarily involving living or studying in a Spanish-speaking country.

Participants interpreted cultural knowledge in a variety of ways. These interpretations included the following: cultural values; customs; language register, particularly with regard to formal and informal vocabulary and expressions; knowledge of historical facts; and knowledge of the history of the language. This variety of understandings of what cultural knowledge of the target language constitutes may explain why participants had different beliefs about its importance and usefulness.

Learning and Communication Strategies

Regarding repetition and practice, all participants strongly agreed that it is important to repeat and practice a lot. Almost all of them also believed that it is important to

practice in the language laboratory. Only Richard and Jennifer expressed the opposite belief, whereas Akram neither agreed nor disagreed with the corresponding statement. Most also believed that it is “o.k.” to guess if you don’t know a word in Spanish. Regarding accuracy, participants believed that it is important to speak Spanish with an excellent accent, with the exception of Margaret, Kelly, and Jennifer, who neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement. There was a certain discrepancy between that belief and the fact that all participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “You shouldn’t say anything in Spanish until you can say it correctly.” At the same time, responses were varied with respect to the statement “If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on.” Results indicated that half of the participants felt self-conscious when speaking Spanish, whereas Margaret, Kelly, Jennifer, and Richard did not. Only Margaret and Richard expressed strong agreement with the statement “If I heard someone speaking Spanish, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.”

Some of the participants’ beliefs regarding language learning strategies and approaches reflected contemporary communicative approaches to language teaching and learning. For example, participants believed in the effectiveness of guessing from context as a strategy for communication. Most importantly, all participants, whether they had the opportunity to frequently interact with Spanish speakers or not, highlighted the fact that it is important to speak with native speakers. Most individuals also referred to the need to practice speaking regardless of one’s level of proficiency. While participants believed that confidence was important in taking advantage of opportunities to practice Spanish,

only Margaret and Richard referred to comfort in speaking and to not feeling self-conscious when speaking with native speakers.

Participants emphasised the importance of practicing oral skills and developing related strategies. However, they also expressed beliefs about strategies or approaches to language learning which focused less on communication and more on drill and practice. For example, they referred to the effectiveness of repetition. Some individuals also commented on the effectiveness of practice in the language laboratory to reinforce what they learned in class.

This difference in participants' beliefs in relation to strategies and approaches to language learning also manifested itself with respect to their beliefs about errors. With the exception of Frank, who focused more on accuracy, participants did not emphasise accuracy. For example, most individuals did not believe that sounding like a native speaker was important. They described errors as natural. Additionally, their comments denoted metacognitive awareness and a belief that errors are in fact a source of learning. Although some of the participants emphasised that errors are natural or a source of learning, they also believed in avoiding "bad habits," and in the importance of accurate pronunciation.

Motivation and Expectations

Participants shared the belief that if they speak Spanish very well, they will have many opportunities to use it. Likewise, they believed that if they learn to speak Spanish very well, it will help them get a good job. They would also like to learn Spanish to get to know its speakers better. Only one individual neither agreed nor disagreed with the

first statement and two individuals did so with the other two. With respect to whether Canadians think that it is important to speak a foreign or second language, two individuals agreed with that statement, two more neither agreed nor disagreed with it, whereas Frank, Akram, Sarah, and Jennifer disagreed with it.

Participants explicitly described motivation as a key factor in learning Spanish. For example, Kelly and Sarah affirmed that being “interested” and “wanting to learn” the language is crucial. Sarah even attributed her success in learning Spanish to her “strong desire” to learn the language. Participants focused on the role of their previous and current contacts and experiences with the target culture in their learning. These included relationships with Spanish speakers locally, participation in Spanish immersion programs abroad, and an exposure to the target culture through cultural artefacts such as movies and music. In particular, for Margaret, Jennifer, Richard, and Stephanie, their initial desire to learn and interest in Spanish originated in a strong attraction to and enjoyment of the target culture. They initially wished to learn Spanish for reasons such as enjoyment in learning the language, an attraction to Spanish music and culture, personal relationships with native speakers, and Hispanic family connections. This attraction, personal attachment, and enjoyment played a crucial role, not only in their initial motivation to learn Spanish, but also in maintaining their motivation to further learn the linguistic and cultural components of the language.

Some participants placed emphasis on their intrinsic motivation for learning Spanish. Those individuals were intrinsically motivated to learn the language in that they felt attracted to and enjoyed the target language and its culture. This was so to the extent that Stephanie, for example, even affirmed that she intended to “pass the language” on to

her children. Margaret and Stephanie in particular exhibited a positive view of native speakers. Margaret also referred to her relationships with native speakers in terms of beneficial reciprocal relationships. Frank and Kelly affirmed that they were enrolled in university Spanish regardless of the academic requirements for their programs. Margaret and Frank's enjoyment of Spanish related to their intrinsic motivation. For example, Margaret enjoyed learning Spanish because it "never felt like a chore." The intrinsic motivation of participants was also highlighted in their descriptions of the personal benefits of learning Spanish and other languages in terms of "personal development," becoming a "richer" person, and increasing knowledge of "oneself and others." These descriptions presented learning Spanish as an enriching experience increasing intrapersonal and interpersonal, intercultural knowledge. Three participants specifically referred to the role of learning languages in increasing self-esteem.

Although participants emphasised intrinsic factors related to learning Spanish, most referred to both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Only one participant, Stephanie, referred exclusively to intrinsic factors as playing a role in her motivation to learn Spanish. Only Sarah and Akram referred exclusively to extrinsic factors for learning Spanish, such as job and travel opportunities. With regard to extrinsic motivation, participants emphasised the importance of learning Spanish for travel and for employment in occupations related to their field of study. As one might expect, they related job opportunities with the importance of learning Spanish given the large number of Spanish speakers worldwide, although two individuals noted that learning Spanish does not have the same importance in Canada as in other countries. Only one person, Sarah, mentioned the ease of learning Spanish as a factor that initially motivated her to learn the language.

Integrativeness, Language Learning Experiences, Self-efficacy, Attribution, and Self-confidence

In the previous section of the present chapter, we compared beliefs between individuals in order to identify commonalities and differences. That section presented a cross-comparison of learners' beliefs across each of the five BALLI dimensions. This section presents an analysis of commonalities between the beliefs across all participants and all dimensions. The purpose of this section is to consider findings in relation to the concepts and theories outlined in Chapter two and the studies reviewed in Chapter three. Analysis of commonalities highlighted concepts which are discussed with reference to those chapters. Those concepts were the following: integrativeness; language learning experiences; and self-efficacy, attribution, and self-confidence.

Integrativeness reflects openness to other cultures as well as an appreciation of and interest in the target language culture and group (Gardner, 2005). For Noels (see Noels, 2001b), integrative reasons for learning a language relate to positive contacts with the target language group, and may even lead to eventual identification with that group. In the present study, integrativeness manifested itself in the importance that participants attached to personal bonds with the target culture and its speakers. Individuals who referred to interacting frequently with native speakers emphasised their personal bonds or personal attachment to speakers of the language. Although not all participants referred to frequent personal interactions with native speakers, they all highlighted their attraction to and interest in the target culture as playing an important role in their learning. Participants' beliefs in the importance of personal bonds with the target culture and its speakers may be related to their success in learning Spanish. As the socio-educational

model of second language acquisition (SLA) indicates, learners with an appreciation and interest in other language groups are more open to learning a second language. The model posits that integrative motivation (which subsumes integrativeness, attitudes towards the learning situation, and motivation) impacts achievement in language learning (see Gardner, 2005).

Wenden (1987) classified beliefs into categories associated with approaches to second language learning. One of them was beliefs about using the language. Within this category, participants believed in the possibility of learning languages in an out-of-classroom context. Sakui and Gaies (2002) investigated the beliefs of learners of English and found a dimension of beliefs reflecting a communicative orientation in learning English. This dimension included, for example, the value of interacting with fluent speakers of English, the importance of oral practice, and the value of using authentic materials as a source of language and cultural input. In the present study, similar concepts to those in Wenden's and Sakui and Gaies' studies manifested themselves in relation to integrativeness. The experiences that participants highlighted in relation to the target culture focused on out-of-classroom language learning contexts, as opposed to classroom language learning. They described out-of-classroom language learning experiences as those through which they gained access to the target culture and its speakers and created bonds with them.

Participants' out-of-classroom language learning did not necessarily or exclusively involve living or studying in a Spanish-speaking country. As was the case for several participants, the opportunity to gain access to the target culture and to develop oral skills through interaction with native speakers presented itself through out-of-classroom

language learning experiences which took place locally. In this study there was less emphasis on learning the language in the target language country than in Barcelos' (1995) study of learners of English, in which one the core beliefs identified was that English-speaking countries are the ideal site for learning English.

Concepts such as enjoyment in language learning, as well as interest and appreciation in relation to the target language and culture, have been related to integrativeness and to integrative and intrinsic reasons for language learning. These types of concepts are important because they draw attention to the affective component of language learning. Gardner noted the affective dimension of the construct of integrativeness when he characterized integrativeness as representing "a socially relevant... affective construct" (p. 11) as well as representing "group-focussed affective reactions" (p. 10). In the context of language learning research based on self-determination, Noels (2001b) described integrative reasons for language learning as involving positive contacts with the target language group, denoting an affective dimension in those reasons. She described intrinsic reasons as encompassing concepts such as enjoyment and aesthetic appreciation. Findings of studies on LLLBs have highlighted the role of affect in language learning. Wenden's (1987) study identified one category of beliefs reflecting beliefs related to personal factors. Within this category, participants referred to emotion and feelings in relation to language learning. In Sakui and Gaies' (2002) investigation of the beliefs of learners of English, a dimension of beliefs reflecting a communicative orientation in learning English included the enjoyment derived from studying the language.

In the present study, the affective component of the construct of integrativeness manifested itself in participants' emotional investment in their bonds with the target culture and speakers. They referred to their enjoyment of language learning experiences involving cultural artefacts and relationships with native speakers. Participants' reasons for learning Spanish also pointed to the role of affect in language learning. They focused more on intrinsic and integrative reasons which, as in Noels' model, related to concepts such as enjoyment, engagement, aesthetic appreciation, and positive experiences with the target language community.

The role of previous experiences in language learning has been highlighted in studies of LLLBs. Cotterall (1995), for example, identified the experience of language learning as one factor underlying responses to a questionnaire about language learning beliefs. Barcelos (2000) found that the origins of learners' beliefs related were "rooted in their language learning experiences" (p. 286), and that they derived from their connections between present and past experiences. The present study did not have as its purpose to examine the origins of learners' beliefs. However, participants placed emphasis on their previous language learning experiences. In particular, they contrasted their experiences learning French and Spanish. They also referred to negative previous experiences learning French.

Because of the context of language learning in Canada, where school learners learn the co-official language (French or English) as a second language, participants were in a position to compare learning Spanish with learning French as a second language. Apart from Akram, who had not studied in the Canadian school system, and Kelly, who intended to major in French, all the other participants had discontinued the study of

French. In the Canadian context, research has identified the role of early experiences in learning French as a second language. For example, Gardner, Masgoret, and Tremblay (1999) found that a variety of experiences and attitudes (e.g. parental encouragement; motivational intensity; French class anxiety; and learner attitudes towards French courses and teachers) influenced learners' present attitudes to learning the language and to its speakers as well as learners' self-perception of proficiency. In the context of the present study, participants referred to the following aspects of their experience learning French, which they often contrasted with their experiences learning Spanish: lack of interest or dislike of French culture; lack of enjoyment of French; lack of contact with native speakers; the compulsory nature of learning French; ineffective teaching practices; and previous lack of success in French (reflected, for example, in poor grades, or perceptions of low proficiency).

Participants' preference of Spanish over French manifested itself to the extent that several participants referred to the phenomenon of learning Spanish as a "default" language, in the sense that they chose to study Spanish *instead of* French. The cognitive ease of learning Spanish did not play a role in participants' preference of Spanish over French. Instead, one of the contrasts that participants emphasised in terms of their preference of Spanish over French was their attraction to and enjoyment of the Hispanic culture as opposed to the French culture. This preference might be explained in terms of participants' integrativeness in relation to Spanish as opposed to French. This contrast between Spanish and French draws attention to the role of establishing bonds with the target culture and its speakers in language learning and the role of affect in language learning.

The differential nature of participants' experiences learning French versus Spanish may have played a role in their current beliefs about the two languages. The contrast of those experiences reveals the importance of previous language learning experiences as highlighted in the literature (e.g. Gardner, Masgoret, & Tremblay, 1999). The purpose and scope of the present study do not allow us to make a general statement about to what extent the learners' present beliefs had their origins in their language learning experiences or were related to other factors. However, similarly to Barcelos' (1995, 2000) findings, our findings pointed to the notion that previous language learning experiences may have played a role in shaping participants' beliefs.

Participants described beliefs about themselves as language learners and about the requirements of language learning which can be discussed within the framework of self-efficacy and attribution beliefs. Self-efficacy is important because it influences learners' choice of activity, the effort they expend on it, and persistence. Higher self-efficacy levels relate to higher motivation to do a particular task (Bandura, 1986, 1991). In L2 learning, self-efficacy beliefs have been related to the use of functional practice strategies (Yang, 1999). In Hsieh's (2004) study, L2 learners' self-efficacy positively correlated with ability and effort attributions. Literature on attribution in language learning has highlighted concepts such as perceived effort (e.g. Williams, Burdens, & Lanvers, 2002). It has also revealed the importance of internal, personal attributions in relation to language learning success. Hsieh (2004) found that learners who made internal attributions had higher self-efficacy beliefs and higher grades than those making external attributions. In White's (1999) study, the factors that participants described as determinants of success were largely internal. For example, they ranked highest internal

factors such as motivation, persistence, and self-knowledge. In relation to findings of those studies, in the present study it would appear that participants had high levels of self-efficacy. They also emphasised their persistence in learning Spanish, in the sense of devoting time and effort to the language. They attributed their success in learning Spanish to internal rather than external factors.

Participants' beliefs about themselves as language learners and about the requirements of language learning also highlighted the importance of self-confidence in language learning. Self-confidence has been associated with success in language learning, and it is considered in L2 learning models such as the social context model (see Clément, 1980) and the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) model (see MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). It affects motivation and, in turn, language achievement (see Clément, 1980; Clément, Gardner, & Smythe, 1977). It is relevant, not only in multicultural contexts, but also in unicultural contexts where there may be little direct contact with L2 speakers (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994), as in the present study. Participants referred to the importance of self-confidence in relation to speaking in authentic contexts in particular. Although they believed in the importance of self-confidence in learning Spanish, however, only two participants referred to not feeling self-conscious speaking with native speakers. Those participants were two of the three participants in the study who referred to frequently speaking with native speakers.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the beliefs of self-identified successful language learners of Spanish at a Canadian university. Data collection relied

on the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory or BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) in combination with an online discussion and individual online interviews. Descriptive profiles of individual participants' beliefs as well as cross-case analysis and comparisons with the literature highlighted beliefs in the importance of opportunities for informal learning in authentic contexts. The analysis also drew attention to the role of the target culture and the establishment of personal bonds in relation to participants' perceived success in learning Spanish. Participants' contrast between their experiences of learning Spanish and learning French as a second language in a Canadian context also emphasised the role of the target culture in their perceived success. Additionally, participants' beliefs related to the target language and culture highlighted the value of out-of-classroom language learning contexts, as opposed to formal classroom settings.

In terms of the value and contribution of the study to research on LLLBs, the study's data collection methods presented advantages related to the fact that all data were collected online. An obvious advantage to this approach is that it provided individuals with time/place flexibility to participate in the study. The fact that participants could take time to reflect about their answers before posting them might have helped provide more thoughtful accounts of their beliefs. This opportunity for reflection is important in a context where the focus is on eliciting beliefs. As Pajares (1992), Rokeach (1968), and others have noted, beliefs may be difficult to get at, and individuals may not always be able to represent their beliefs accurately.

The approach to data collection also presents some limitations. Participants in this study were asked to answer five prompts using the discussion forum. They were therefore able to view other participants' responses. This might potentially have

influenced their answers. It was not in the scope of this study, however, to evaluate if and to what extent this may have been the case. Additionally, that disadvantage may be offset by the fact that being able to read others' responses might actually have provided participants with the opportunity to reflect more on their own beliefs in relation to the beliefs of others and to articulate their own more easily.

In terms of other limitations, attrition occurred during the different phases of the study, particularly after completion of the questionnaire. Attrition at that point might have related to the requirement to participate online, in terms of the need to type all answers or to post messages in a period that extended over two weeks. Participants may not have been familiar with uses of computer technology for research purposes, and some may have felt more willing to use technology or more comfortable using technology than others. The selection of a large group of 28 participants at the beginning was in anticipation of attrition.

A further limitation of the use of online communication in the study relates to the fact that participants did not use the discussion forum features in WebCT to their maximum potential. Besides posting answers to the prompts in the discussion, participants could post messages in relation to other participants' messages. A discussion among participants subsequent to their replies to the prompts might have further stimulated discussion about their beliefs and provided additional insights. However, this was not made a requirement in terms of participation in the study but was left at the discretion of participants. None of the participants used this feature. One reason for this may have been that participants were from two Spanish classes and therefore were not guaranteed anonymity. Therefore, they may have been reluctant to react to other people's

messages in the discussion, especially if they wished to express disagreement. Additionally, increasing the demands for participation might have prevented some potential participants from taking part in the study.

As highlighted in Chapter three, studies of language learners' beliefs have frequently relied on use of questionnaires such as the BALLI. Because the goal of the present study was to gain in-depth, holistic insight into LLLBs, we could not rely on use of a questionnaire alone. For this reason, we added two open-ended questions to the 34 closed-ended questionnaire items. As well, we incorporated more open-ended opportunities such as an online discussion as well as individual online interviews.

In terms of use of the BALLI questionnaire in this study, the same questionnaire item may have been interpreted differently. For example, comments gathered through the other data collection methods indicated that participants had different interpretations of what "the culture of Spanish-speaking countries" referred to in Item 8. Those comments, as opposed to responses to that item in the questionnaire, revealed that participants meant different things when they referred to "culture."

For the most part, data collected through the online group discussion as well as individual online interviews confirmed the individual questionnaire results. However, as outlined previously in this chapter, there may have been discrepancies between an individual's response to a specific questionnaire item and the individual's comments gathered through the other data collection methods. For example, in the questionnaire, five participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "It is better to learn Spanish in a Spanish-speaking country." However, participants did not place the same emphasis on that belief when communicating in the discussion or interviews. In that context, they

described learning in a Spanish-speaking country as useful but not essential. These types of discrepancies may have resulted largely from the closed-ended nature of the 34 questionnaire items, which restricted participants' answers to one of five responses, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

A limitation of the study's research design lies in the fact that it proved difficult to relate findings of the present study to those of studies using the BALLI or other questionnaires as the main or sole data collection method. Studies based on the BALLI tend to focus on how results reveal learners' "misconceptions" about language learning, whereas the present study focused more on describing participants' beliefs from their own perspective. Studies using the BALLI typically present results in terms of percentages corresponding to responses to the 34 questionnaire items, and those results are presented for the whole group (e.g. Horwitz, 1988). The number of participants in studies of LLLBs using the BALLI or other questionnaires can be large, as in studies by Hsieh (2004) (N= 500) and Sakui and Gaies (1999) (N=1,296). Some studies using questionnaires have focused on possible correlations between beliefs and other variables, such as language learning strategy use (e.g. Yang, 1999). In some cases, beliefs have been investigated over time (e.g. Hsieh, 2004; Kern, 1995; Yang, 1999). The present study differed from the outlined studies in different ways: it focused on gaining holistic insight into the beliefs of eight individuals, rather than on surveying a large group of learners; it did not seek to correlate beliefs with other variables using quantitative analysis; and it did not study beliefs over time. Comparing findings of the present study with findings of studies using interviews, as opposed to questionnaires, was more viable because studies using interviews tend to focus on a small number of participants and

provide descriptive accounts of their beliefs rather than numerical results, as was the case in this study.

Implications

Participants highlighted the role of opportunities for access to the target culture and authentic practice, and referred to those opportunities in the context of out-of-classroom rather than classroom settings. An important implication of this finding might be the need to integrate formal classroom instruction and out-of-classroom language learning into the design of L2 learning programmes, and to focus on authenticity in language learning. In order for learners to develop personal bonds with the target culture, they may need to be provided with opportunities to engage in authentic language practice and to access the target culture in the diverse contexts of the classroom, the local educational setting (e.g. on campus), the local community, and beyond.

More specifically, implications for L2 classroom teaching might include the use of teaching approaches that integrate culture effectively into language teaching. Teaching that focuses on developing intercultural competence, sensitivity towards the target culture, and an appreciation of the target language culture might achieve this goal. Approaches such as experiential L2 learning, for example, have highlighted the role of the development of intercultural competence in language learning. Another implication might involve creating opportunities in L2 classroom learning settings for interaction with native Spanish speakers or other learners of Spanish, locally or otherwise, so that they can develop oral skills as well as gain access to the target culture. The integration of these

opportunities for interaction might work towards promoting self-confidence in speaking and use of the language for communicative purposes.

The effective integration of technology into language teaching might be one way to promote those types of interactions where such opportunities are not readily available. Additionally, there is a reason for optimism in that the participants in the study did not conceive of immersion in Spanish-speaking countries as essential for learning Spanish or as the only way of achieving proficiency in Spanish. Therefore, the development of an affinity with the target language culture may not be restricted to learning in immersion settings in Spanish-speaking countries.

A particular characteristic of the participants in the study in terms of motivation was that they expressed an interest in learning languages in general and a desire to learn other languages. They were all multilingual and had learned at least two second or foreign languages besides French, except for one participant. Five participants had already established specific language learning goals, including independent study of Spanish and studying further foreign languages, and language learning appeared to be a lifelong learning pursuit for them. Despite their general interest in languages, however, most of them had discontinued the study of French. Previous experiences may have influenced this decision. Future studies might focus on multilingual learners, and might compare learning French as a second language and learning Spanish and other foreign languages in Canadian contexts. The focus might be on the influence of previous language learning experiences and on how learners develop personal bonds with the target language culture. In terms of investigating the beliefs of learners of Spanish in Canadian contexts in particular, further studies might consider investigating those beliefs in relation to specific

language learning variables, in relation to actions or behaviours, or in terms of change in beliefs over time.

Other implications for research relate to the use of data collection methods in studies of LLLBs. It is obvious that using the BALLI or another beliefs questionnaire alone would not have allowed for an in-depth investigation of beliefs. The elicitation of participants' beliefs through the other data collection methods provided more specific insights into beliefs. In some cases, discrepancies were observed between responses to BALLI items and participants' comments gathered through the other data collection methods. It also seems that the same questionnaire item might have been open to different interpretations. Additionally, important concepts that emerged in the context of the present study such as enjoyment and integrativeness in learning Spanish were not adequately represented in the questionnaire. Researchers may wish to further investigate ways of refining beliefs questionnaires such as the BALLI. This might include working towards avoiding ambiguity in the wording of items as well as including open-ended items to allow participants to further comment on their beliefs. It might also involve adapting the questionnaire to the particular context of the study to include concepts that may be relevant in that context. Additionally, the present study used a combination of data collection methods to focus on individual learners' beliefs. Researchers may wish to further examine how combining data collection methods such as the ones used in the present study or others might be useful in profiling individual learners' beliefs.

Summary

This chapter presented a cross-analysis of the participants' profiles in order to identify commonalities as well as differences between beliefs. The chapter also considered the findings in relation to the concepts and theories outlined in Chapter two and the studies reviewed in Chapter three. It also presented conclusions as well as implications for teaching and research.

Participants considered Spanish easier to learn than other languages. They identified the similarities of Spanish, especially in terms of cognates, with French and English, and believed that Spanish had fewer grammatical exceptions than other languages. Margaret, Frank, Sarah, and Stephanie referred to having discontinued the study of French, and related their discontinuance of French to negative beliefs about French, the francophone culture, and its cultural artefacts, as well as to negative previous learning experiences. Participants highlighted the ease and difficulty of learning Spanish in formal versus informal or didactic versus authentic contexts. These authentic contexts were those in which there were opportunities for using the language with native speakers, yet did not necessarily or exclusively involve living or studying in Spanish-speaking countries.

Participants who communicated frequently with native speakers tended to focus on their personal contacts with native speakers and/or exposure to the language through cultural artefacts when commenting on their success in learning Spanish. They referred to experiencing enjoyment in these activities. Other participants such as Akram, Sarah, Kelly, and Stephanie did not refer to having frequent personal contacts with native speakers frequently. However, they also believed in the importance of using the language

to communicate with native speakers or referred to the use of and attraction to cultural artefacts related to the language. Participants attributed their success in Spanish to the following factors: regular practice; amount of time; amount of effort; and a desire, interest in, and enjoyment of learning the language.

Whereas from the questionnaire responses alone it may appear as if participants did not believe in the importance of grammar and vocabulary, their discussion and interview comments revealed their belief that grammar and vocabulary were important in learning Spanish. In particular, they specified that learning grammar and vocabulary facilitated the production of comprehensible output in the target language. Some participants referred to the value of having the opportunity to interact with native speakers and form personal bonds with them and their culture. Those bonds involved affective investment on the part of the learners in the language and its culture. They often referred to those bonds in terms of “enjoyment” or “fun” in learning about the language and its culture.

Some of the participants’ beliefs regarding language learning strategies and approaches reflected contemporary communicative approaches to language teaching and learning. These included beliefs about the effectiveness of guessing from context as a strategy for communication and about the importance of speaking with native speakers. While participants believed that confidence was important in taking advantage of opportunities to practice Spanish, only Margaret and Richard referred to not feeling self-conscious when speaking with native speakers. Participants also expressed beliefs about strategies or approaches to language learning which focused less on communication and more on drill and practice.

Participants explicitly described motivation as a key factor in learning Spanish. They also focused on the role of their previous and current contacts and experiences with the target culture in their learning. These included relationships with Spanish speakers locally, participation in Spanish immersion programs abroad, and an exposure to the target culture through cultural artefacts such as movies and music. Some participants were intrinsically motivated to learn the language in that they felt attracted to and enjoyed the target language and its culture. Participants' descriptions presented learning Spanish as an enriching experience increasing intrapersonal and interpersonal, intercultural knowledge. Although they emphasised intrinsic factors related to learning Spanish, most referred to both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. With regard to extrinsic motivation, participants emphasised the importance of learning Spanish for travel and for employment in occupations related to their field of study.

Descriptive profiles of individual participants' beliefs as well as cross-case analysis and comparisons with the literature highlighted the importance of beliefs related to informal opportunities for learning in authentic contexts such as through interactions with native speakers and the target culture. Similar concepts to those in studies by Wenden (1987) and Sakui and Gaies (1999) manifested themselves in the present study in relation to integrativeness. The experiences that participants highlighted in relation to the target culture focused on out-of-classroom language learning contexts, as opposed to classroom language learning. They described out-of-classroom language learning experiences as those through which they gained access to the target culture and its speakers and created bonds with them. In the present study, the affective component of the construct of integrativeness (see Gardner, 2005) manifested itself in participants' emotional

investment in their bonds with the target culture and speakers. They referred to their enjoyment of language learning experiences involving cultural artefacts and relationships with native speakers.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of previous experiences in language learning (e.g. Cotterall, 1995; Barcelos, 2000). In the present study, participants placed emphasis on their previous language learning experiences. They contrasted their experiences learning French and Spanish. They referred to the following aspects of their experience learning French, which they often contrasted with their experiences learning Spanish: lack of interest or dislike of French culture; lack of enjoyment of French; lack of contact with native speakers; the compulsory nature of learning French; ineffective teaching practices; and previous lack of success in French (reflected, for example, in poor grades, or perceptions of low proficiency). Participants emphasised their attraction to and enjoyment of the Hispanic culture as opposed to the French culture.

Participants described beliefs about themselves as language learners and about the requirements of language learning which can be discussed within the framework of self-efficacy and attribution beliefs. In relation to findings of studies focusing on those concepts in language learning (e.g. Hsieh, 2004; White, 1999; Williams, Burdens, & Lanvers, 2002), in the present study it would appear that participants had high levels of self-efficacy. Participants emphasised devoting time and effort to the language and attributed their success in learning Spanish to internal rather than external factors. Participants' beliefs about themselves as language learners and about the requirements of language learning also highlighted the importance of self-confidence in language

learning. They referred to the importance of self-confidence in relation to speaking Spanish in authentic contexts.

In terms of the value and contribution of the study to research on LLLBs, the study's data collection methods presented advantages related to the fact that all data were collected online. For example, individuals had time/place flexibility to participate in the study. The fact that participants could take time to reflect about their answers before posting them might have helped provide more thoughtful accounts of their beliefs, which is important in a context where the focus is on eliciting beliefs. The approach to data collection used also presented some limitations. Participants were able to view other participants' responses in the discussion. This might potentially have influenced their answers. Attrition occurred during the different phases of the study. A further limitation of the use of online communication in the study relates to the fact that participants did not use the discussion forum features in WebCT to their maximum potential.

Participants referred to opportunities for access to the target culture and authentic practice in the context of out-of-classroom rather than classroom settings. An important implication of this finding might be the need to integrate formal classroom instruction and out-of-classroom language learning into the design of L2 learning programmes, and to focus on authenticity in language learning. The effective integration of technology into language teaching might be one way to promote interactions with Spanish speakers where such opportunities are not readily available.

Future studies might focus on multilingual learners, and might compare learning French as a second language and learning Spanish and other foreign languages in Canadian contexts. In terms of investigating the beliefs of learners of Spanish in

Canadian contexts in particular, further studies might consider investigating those beliefs in relation to specific language learning variables, in relation to actions or behaviours, or in terms of change in beliefs over time. Other implications for research relate to the use of data collection methods in studies of LLLBs. Researchers may wish to investigate ways of refining beliefs questionnaires such as the BALLI. Researchers may also wish to further examine how combining data collection methods such as the ones used in the present study or others might be useful in profiling individual learners' beliefs.

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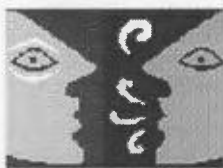
Appendix A: Introduction Template in WebCT



iBienvenid@s!



Questionnaire



Discuss Your
Beliefs



E-mail



Spanish
Resources

New resources available!

Appendix B: Information for Participants and Consent Form

Information for students regarding participation in the study of the beliefs of successful adult learners of Spanish as a foreign language:

You are invited to participate in a study of the beliefs of self-identified successful learners of Spanish. The purpose of the study is to explore and describe the language learning beliefs of Spanish learners who consider themselves successful. The findings of the study should contribute to understanding language learning beliefs, the role they play in language learning, and their origins, and to the investigation of the beliefs of Spanish learners in the context of Higher Education in Canada. This type of research may also be of special interest for second- and foreign- language instructors and educators in furthering their awareness of learners' beliefs and helping inform practice. The study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life).

The study focuses on the beliefs of self-identified successful learners of Spanish. In this regard, the definition of success used in the study is broad and is not based on grades, but can relate to such factors as: peer recognition or recognition by others (family, teachers, etc.); perceived success in language learning; perceived high motivation, effort, enjoyment, or satisfaction in relation to learning Spanish or other languages; or any other factors.

Participation is voluntary. Should you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign the consent form which is attached.

The study involves the following:

- Completing a questionnaire of language learning beliefs in your own time (this will take about 10 minutes), consisting of items such as the following:

Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules:

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree nor Disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

- An individual session of approximately 15 minutes (if needed) to become familiar with posting, answering, and viewing messages in WebCT.
- Contributing to an online discussion about language learning. The discussion uses WebCT and consists of 5 short discussion prompts (given in English). One example of prompt is the following: “*What do you believe are the most and the least difficult aspects of learning Spanish compared to other languages?*” You will be asked to post 1 message answering each prompt to share your beliefs and are also encouraged to contribute further comments and comment on other people’s messages. The discussion will begin at the end of September and will remain open for contributions for 2-3 weeks.
- While the discussion is ongoing, the researcher will send brief e-mails (in English) to participants individually to ask them to comment further on aspects of their beliefs in order to gain a deeper understanding of beliefs.

If you have further questions about this study or your participation, you may contact either or both of the following individuals:

▪ **Principal investigator, María A. Rodríguez Manzanares:** (709) 737-4748, or by email mariar@mun.ca

▪ **Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Murphy:** (709)-737-7634, or by email emurphy@mun.ca

The study is being conducted by María A. Rodríguez Manzanares, a Master of Education student, and it has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR). If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 737-8368.

Consent form

I understand that:

1. my participation in this project is limited to completing a questionnaire, attending a short individual session to become familiar with WebCT if I consider it necessary, contributing to an online discussion about language learning beliefs, and answering e-mails from the researcher about language learning beliefs while the online discussion is taking place.
2. only the researcher and thesis supervisor will have access to the completed questionnaires and the texts of the e-mails.
3. only the researcher, thesis supervisor, and participants in the study will be able to view messages in the online discussion.
4. because of the limited number of participants in the online discussion, the information I contribute to it may not be confidential, even if participants are identified by participant numbers.
5. I will receive the texts of my discussion messages and e-mails for validation once the online discussion is finished, and I can choose to edit or eliminate any parts.
6. by agreeing to participate in this study, I am providing consent to publication of my comments in anonymous format in part or in whole in subsequent research reports and papers which may be published in relation to the study. In no case will comments from individual participants be identified, but pseudonyms will be used.
7. should I decide to participate, that my participation is voluntary and not linked to my role as a student in any courses at this university, and that there is no penalty for not taking part in the study.
8. I can decide to withdraw from the study at any time.
9. any resulting publication(s) will be made available to me upon my request.

10. the researcher María A. Rodríguez Manzanares and her thesis supervisor Dr. Elizabeth Murphy will be available during the study to answer any questions I might have.

☐ I have read the information about this study and provide my consent to participate in the study.

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Participants' Signature

Date

☐ I do not wish to participate in the study, thank you.

Appendix C: Questionnaire Items by Dimension

Items ¹		
Dimension 1	3	Some languages are easier to learn than others.
	4 ²	The language I am trying to learn, Spanish, is:
	5	The language I am trying to learn, Spanish, is structured in the same way as English.
	6	I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak Spanish very well.
	14 ³	If someone spent one hour a day learning Spanish, how long would it take him/her to become fluent?
	24	It is easier to speak than understand Spanish.
	28	It is easier to read and write Spanish than to speak and understand it.
Dimension 2	1	It is easier for children than adults to learn Spanish.
	2	Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn Spanish.
	10	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
	15	I have aptitude for learning Spanish.
	22	Women are better than men at learning Spanish.
	29	People who are good at math and science are not good at learning Spanish.
	32	People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.
	33	Canadians are good at learning Spanish.
	34	Everyone can learn to speak Spanish.
Dimension 3	8	It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.
	11	It is better to learn Spanish in a Spanish-speaking country.
	16	Learning Spanish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.
	20	Learning Spanish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.
	25	Learning Spanish is different from learning other school subjects.
	26	Learning Spanish is mostly a matter of translating from English.
Dimension 4	<i>Learning strategies</i>	
	17	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.
	21	It is important to practice in the language laboratory.
	<i>Communication strategies</i>	
	7	It is important to speak Spanish with an excellent accent.
	9	You shouldn't say anything in Spanish until you can say it correctly.
	12	If I heard someone speaking Spanish, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.
	13	It's o.k. to guess if you don't know a word in Spanish.
	18	I feel self-conscious speaking Spanish in front of other people.
	19	If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on.
Dimension 5	23	If I get to speak Spanish very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.
	27	If I learn to speak Spanish very well, it will help me to get a good job.
	30	Canadians think that it is important to speak Spanish.
	31	I would like to learn Spanish so that I can get to know its speakers better.

¹ Responses for all items, except Item 4 and Item 14 (see note ² and note ³)

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

² Responses for item 4:

- A. a very difficult language
- B. a difficult language
- C. a language of medium difficulty
- D. an easy language
- E. a very easy language

³ Responses for item 14:

- A. less than a year
- B. 1 - 2 years
- C. 3 - 5 years
- D. 5 - 10 years
- E. you can't learn a language in 1 hour a day

Appendix D: Questionnaire in WebCT

Your beliefs about learning Spanish

Name:

Start time: October 4, 2005 11:30am

Number of questions: 36

[Finish](#) [Help](#)

Question 1

It is easier for children than adults to learn Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

[Save answer](#)

Question 2

Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

[Save answer](#)

Question 3

Some languages are easier to learn than others.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree

- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 4

The language I am trying to learn, Spanish, is:

- ☐ a. A very difficult language
- ☐ b. A difficult language
- ☐ c. A language of medium difficulty
- ☐ d. An easy language
- ☐ e. A very easy language

Save answer

Question 5

The language I am trying to learn, Spanish, is structured in the same way as my first language.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 6

I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak Spanish very well.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree

- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 7

It is important to speak Spanish with an excellent accent.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 8

It is necessary to know the culture of Spanish-speaking countries in order to speak Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 9

You shouldn't say anything in Spanish until you can say it correctly.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree

- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 10 ⋮

It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 11 ⋮

It is better to learn Spanish in a Spanish-speaking country.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 12 ⋮

If I heard someone speaking Spanish, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree

- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 13

It's o.k. to guess if you don't know a word in Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 14

If someone spent one hour a day learning Spanish, how long would it take him/her to become fluent?

- ☐ a. Less than a year
- ☐ b. 1 - 2 years
- ☐ c. 3 - 5 years
- ☐ d. 5 - 10 years
- ☐ e. You can't learn Spanish in 1 hour a day

Save answer

Question 15

I have aptitude for learning Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree

- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 16

Learning Spanish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 17

It is important to repeat and practice a lot.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 18

I feel self-conscious speaking Spanish in front of other people.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 19

If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 20

Learning Spanish is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 21

It is important to practice in the language laboratory.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 22

Women are better than men at learning Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 23

If I get to speak Spanish very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 24

It is easier to speak than understand Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 25

Learning Spanish is different from learning other school subjects.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 26

Learning Spanish is mostly a matter of translating from your first language.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 27

If I learn to speak Spanish very well, it will help me to get a good job.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 28

It is easier to read and write Spanish than to speak and understand it.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree

- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 29

People who are good at math and science are not good at learning Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 30

Canadians think that it is important to speak Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 31

I would like to learn Spanish so that I can get to know its speakers better.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree

- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 32

People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 33

Canadians are good at learning Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 34

Everyone can learn to speak Spanish.

- ☐ a. Strongly Agree
- ☐ b. Agree
- ☐ c. Neither Agree nor Disagree

- ☐ d. Disagree
- ☐ e. Strongly Disagree

Save answer

Question 35

Use this space to add any comments or questions regarding any items in the survey.



Save answer

Question 36

Explain why you consider yourself a successful learner of Spanish.



Save answer

Finish

Appendix E: Welcome Message to the Discussion in WebCT

Subject: Update

Message no. 1

Author: Maria Rodriguez

Date: Monday, October 17, 2005 2:16pm

Hola a tod@s

I hope you will all be comfortable with this e-mail tool. You can use it to send me any questions / comments you may have.

First of all, thank you very much for completing the questionnaire. Your responses were very interesting.

We are now moving to the discussion. It will remain open for two weeks approximately, until the end of October. You may wish to answer some discussion questions the first week and the remaining ones the second week. You may also wish to include you name in your messages to make it easier for others to follow the discussion.

By logging in periodically you can check the e-mail icon and view other people's messages. Feel free to interact with others in the discussion, by using the "Reply" button.

I am looking forward to reading all your comments.

Gracias y hasta luego

Maria

PS. New Spanish resources are now available. The list will be regularly expanded during the discussion period.

Reply Forward Quote Download Close



Appendix F: Instructions for the Discussion in WebCT

Subject: About the discussion

⏪ ⏩ ⋮

Reply

Message no. 12

Author: Maria Rodriguez

Date: Tuesday, September 20, 2005 10:14am

iHola!

Bienvenidos/as y gracias por su participación.

In "Discuss Your Beliefs," you will have the opportunity to express and discuss your beliefs about learning Spanish with fellow Spanish learners. Understanding beliefs is paramount to understanding language learning. Your beliefs are important!

To help keep the discussion running smoothly, please take note of the following:

- You are all encouraged to post an **initial message** to introduce yourselves and provide some background information about your experience learning Spanish and other languages.
- Please **answer the prompts in order (1-5)** so that everybody can follow at the same time.
- After you have answered each prompt, you are encouraged to view other people's messages and to contribute further messages. These can take the form of comments about other people's contributions, answers or reactions to their messages, questions, reflections, your language learning experiences, etc.
- Express your beliefs/opinions freely, with respect and courtesy.
- Use the **"Reply"** button when posting messages in the discussion. Only use the **"Reply privately"** button to send a message to me.

I hope you will enjoy the discussion. ¡Hasta pronto!

⏪ ⏩ ⋮

Appendix G: Sample of Initial Coding of a Transcript Fragment

TEXT	TEXT UNITS	CODES
<p>I began learning French when I was in grade 4 and the teacher knew about as much French as we students. It was never something that was fun in class and the interest and importance of learning French was never stressed to us. I think my dislike for French began there and as the years continued, the dislike grew more and more. When I reached high school, I could barely conjugate a simple verb like "to have". So I fell behind everyone else in my class, who seemed to have been previous French immersion students, so they spoke French with fair ease.</p> <p>Spanish was something I began learning on my own. I was bored in classes and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I began learning French when I was in grade 4 and the teacher knew about as much French as we students. • It was never something that was fun in class • and the interest and importance of learning French was never stressed to us. • I think my dislike for French began there • and as the years continued, the dislike grew more and more. • When I reached high school, I could barely conjugate a simple verb like "to have". • So I fell behind everyone else in my class, who seemed to have been previous French immersion students, so they spoke French with fair ease. • Spanish was something I began learning on my own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffective teaching of French • Lack of enjoyment of French • Effective language teaching makes learners interested in language • Effective language teaching stresses the importance of language learning • Dislike of French • Continued dislike of French • Lack of sense of progress/achievement in French • Lack of sense of progress/achievement with respect to peers in French • Autonomous Spanish learner • Intrinsic motivation

<p>bored learning a language that I didn't really like, so I picked up some Spanish books and Spanish music and started learning. Just because I knew I could do well in Spanish I decided to take the class in high school to help boost my average, but it was the same as my elementary school French classes. Spanish was never spoken, we only practiced what was in the text and then the remainder of the class would be doing whatever we wanted. I moved out of that class to the more advanced Spanish class hoping it would be more of a challenge but it was the exact same. No one in that class could speak Spanish properly and I didn't really learn anything I didn't already know.</p> <p>Really I should have been bored with Spanish too, but I'm a huge fan of Shakira's haha and I guess the wanting to understand her Spanish lyrics also pushed me to pursue Spanish. I found lots of ways to have fun with Spanish, more so than French. I've</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was bored in classes and bored learning a language that I didn't really like, • so I picked up some Spanish books and Spanish music and started learning. • Just because I knew I could do well in Spanish I decided to take the class in high school to help boost my average, • but it was the same as my elementary school French classes. • Spanish was never spoken, • we only practiced what was in the text • and then the remainder of the class would be doing whatever we wanted. • I moved out of that class to the more advanced Spanish class hoping it would be more of a challenge but it was the exact same. • No one in that class could speak Spanish properly and I didn't really learn anything I didn't already know. • Really I should have been bored with Spanish too, but I'm a huge fan of Shakira's haha and I guess the wanting to understand her Spanish lyrics also pushed me to pursue Spanish. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dislike of French • Autonomous Spanish learner • Intrinsic motivation • Spanish as "default L2" • Self-perception of proficiency • Ineffective teaching of Spanish • Ineffective teaching of Spanish • Ineffective teaching of Spanish • Ineffective teaching of Spanish • Lack of challenge in previous learning of Spanish • Sense of progress/achievement is important in language learning • Cultural artefacts as motivation to learn Spanish
--	---	---

<p>tried to watch French TV in hopes I could learn or at least get interested but it doesn't work. But there's so much fun Spanish music out there :) I've been in more contact with Spanish speaking people, I love the sound of the language more, the flow of Spanish, and I love the culture of Spanish speaking countries. I can honestly say I have never liked the French culture.</p> <p>I think the poor foundation I had in French was the reason when I hit high school I was ashamed of how poorly I spoke it and I got in a mentality that French was difficult. But Spanish was always fun for me, it never felt like a chore to study because it was something that I wanted to do for myself.</p> <p>The more I think about it the more confused I get. It's a very interesting question so I hope this</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I found lots of ways to have fun with Spanish, more so than French. • I've tried to watch French TV in hopes I could learn or at least get interested but it doesn't work. • But there's so much fun Spanish music out there :) • I've been in more contact with Spanish speaking people, • I love the sound of the language more, • the flow of Spanish, • and I love the culture of Spanish-speaking countries. • I can honestly say I have never liked the French culture. • I think the poor foundation I had in French was the reason when I hit high school I was ashamed of how poorly I spoke it and I got in a mentality that French was difficult. • But Spanish was always fun for me, • it never felt like a chore to study because it was something 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyment of Spanish through cultural artefacts • Lack of enjoyment of French cultural artefacts • Enjoyment of Spanish music • More interactions with natives in Spanish than French • Aesthetic pleasure of Spanish • Aesthetic displeasure of French • Aesthetic pleasure of Spanish • Aesthetic displeasure of French • Enjoyment of Spanish culture • Dislike of French culture • Sense of lack of proficiency in French in high school • Sense of progress/achievement is important in language learning • Enjoyment of Spanish • Enjoyment of Spanish related to intrinsic
---	--	--

<p>provides a bit of an answer.</p> <p>:)</p>	<p>that I wanted to do for myself.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The more I think about it the more confused I get.• It's a very interesting question so I hope this provides a bit of an answer. <p>:)</p>	<p>motivation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>No code</i>• <i>No code</i>
---	--	---

Appendix H: Tables with Questionnaire Responses for all Participants

Dimension 1: The difficulty of language learning					
Item	Responses ¹				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
3	Fran Akra Sara Step	Marg Kell Jenn Rich			
4 ²			Kell - C Akra - C Sara - C Step - C	Marg - D Fran - D Jenn - D Rich - D	
5		Fran Step	Kell Sara Rich	Marg Akra Jenn	
6	Marg Fran Jenn Rich	Kell Akra Sara	Step		
14 ³			Fran - C Sara - C Rich - C Step - C	Marg - D Akra - D	Kell - E Jenn - E
24		Marg	Kell Akra Jenn Rich Step	Fran Sara	
28	Fran Akra Sara		Marg Rich Step	Kell	Jenn

Dimension 2: Foreign language aptitude					
Item	Responses ¹				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Akra	Marg Fran Sara Jenn Step	Kell	Rich	
2			Kell Sara Jenn Step	Marg Fran Akra Rich	
10	Fran Sara Rich Step	Jenn	Kell	Marg	Akra
15	Marg Jenn Rich	Fran Akra Sara Step	Kell		
22			Marg Fran Sara	Akra Step	Kell Jenn Rich
29			Jenn	Marg Kell	Fran Akra Sara Rich Step
32	Sara	Fran	Marg Akra Jenn Rich Step	Kell	
33		Marg	Fran Akra Sara Jenn Rich Step	Kell	
34	Fran Akra Sara Jenn Step	Marg Kell Rich			

Dimension 3: The nature of language learning					
Item	Responses ¹				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
8		Marg Fran Kell Sara Step	Akra	Rich	Jenn
11	Fran Akra Sara Rich	Step	Marg Kell Jenn		
16		Fran Jenn		Marg Kell Akra Step	Sara Rich
20		Jenn	Fran Sara Rich	Marg Kell Akra Step	
25	Fran Sara	Marg Kell Akra Jenn Rich		Step	
26	Akra		Fran	Step	Marg Kell Sara Jenn Rich

Dimension 4: Language and communication strategies					
Item	Responses ¹				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
	<i>Learning strategies</i>				
17	Marg Fran Kell Akra Sara Jenn Rich Step				
21	Fran Kell	Marg Sara Step	Akra	Jenn	Rich
	<i>Communication strategies</i>				
7	Rich	Fran Akra Sara Step	Marg Kell Jenn		
9				Marg Kell Sara Rich	Fran Akra Jenn Step
12	Marg Rich		Akra Step	Kell Sara Jenn	Fran
13	Jenn Rich	Marg Fran Kell Akra	Sara Step		
18	Sara	Fran Akra Step		Marg Kell Jenn	Rich
19	Marg Jenn	Fran Akra Step	Sara	Kell Rich	

Dimension 5: Motivations and expectations					
Item	Responses ¹				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
3	Fran Akra Sara Rich	Marg Jenn Step	Kell		
27	Sara Jenn	Marg Fran Akra Rich	Kell Step		
30		Rich Step	Marg Kell	Fran Akra Sara Jenn	
31	Marg Akra Sara Jenn Rich Step		Fran Kell		

Note. Participants' names are referenced as follows: Fran (Frank); Kell (Kelly); Akra (Akram); Sara (Sarah); Jenn (Jennifer); Rich (Richard); Step (Stephanie).

¹ Responses for all items, except Item 4 and Item 14 (see note ² and note ³)

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neither Agree nor Disagree
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

² Responses for item 4:

- A. a very difficult language
- B. a difficult language
- C. a language of medium difficulty
- D. an easy language
- E. a very easy language

³ Responses for item 14:

- A. less than a year
- B. 1 - 2 years
- C. 3 - 5 years
- D. 5 - 10 years
- E. you can't learn a language in 1 hour a day

