

Project Title: Learning and Analyzing The Preterit and Imperfect

Principal Investigators: Laura M Merino and Matthew Field

Contact: Matthew Field mfield@uwlax.edu

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Course Name: Intermediate Spanish 1

Course Description: Spanish 201 is a 3rd semester Spanish class and the first of two intermediate Spanish classes. This particular lesson focuses on the difference between the preterit and imperfect tenses which falls in the 3rd month of the semester. There were 23 and 24 students and each class session lasted 55 minutes.

Abstract: The difference between the preterit and imperfect is a key intermediate grammatical concept in Spanish foreign language classes so this study aimed to observe student's thought processes when analyzing it. Students would be given the task of completing a paragraph in the past that involved verbs in both tenses while the investigators walked around observing student's strategies and methods of choosing either preterit or imperfect. Students were tasked with not only completing the verbs correctly but also discussing in groups and writing down the reason why they chose what they chose. Student's discussions helped investigators learn that a few key words throughout the paragraph were causing confusion as to what the implications were for the students responsible for choosing between preterit and imperfect.

The Lesson

Learning Goals: The purpose of this lesson was to help students understand the differences between the preterit and imperfect tense. Initially the hope was to help students identify why certain verbs were in each tense and then in future lessons the progression would be for the students to develop the skills further to be able to produce their own material in the past tense. This lesson helped students critically think about the specific reasons before conjugating each verb. It was developed to foster collaboration with classmates to help analysis within the activity. Once students worked together to come up with reasons to justify each verb conjugation they would be better prepared to understand the phenomenon on a deep enough level to produce it naturally in the future.

Lesson Plan: At different points earlier in the semester the preterit and imperfect were introduced to the students. They were each presented on their own and while specific reasons were given as to when to use each one the focus was on how to conjugate them. The day before the lesson study both were reintroduced with the focus now being on the difference in usage between the two.

Step 1: To begin the class we distributed the following paragraph (Appendix A) and asked students to conjugate all verbs in either the preterit or imperfect depending on the context of the paragraph. They were also asked to give specific reasons for why they chose either preterit or imperfect in the corresponding space. They were given 15 minutes to complete this individually.

Step 2: The instructor spent the next 5 minutes reviewing the specific reasons for preterit and imperfect to help prepare them for the next step.

Step 3: Students work in groups of 2 and compare their completed paragraphs. They are given the same blank paragraph so they can fill it out together. They were instructed to discuss out loud why they chose what they did. If they agreed on the conjugation they also had to agree with the specific reason given to choose that conjugation. It is important to note that we limited the discussion to Spanish in the first class and we found that allowing English in this part in the 2nd class allowed us to collect more ideas of their thinking. Students were given 15 minutes to complete this task

Step 4: We display the correct conjugations for all verbs in the paragraph and ask them to compare the answers they got in groups. If their answer is the same as the one displayed we asked them to make sure they were confident that the reason was also correct. If they had a different answer we asked them to discuss possible reasons they arrived at a different conclusion. Students were given 10 minutes to complete this task.

Step 5: The teacher displays the correct answers to both verb conjugations as well as the reasons and gives the students 10 minutes to ask questions to clear up any confusion as to why any verb is conjugated as it is.

The Study

Approach: While one investigator was leading the class and making sure students were moving along with the activities; the other investigator was walking around taking notes of student's conversations. The discussions of why a certain student picked one conjugation while another picked a different one led them to discuss their understanding of the rules and how that fit into the specific paragraph they were given. Some discussion topics that will help us design lessons in the future were statements like, "how many times can this happen in the past?", "is the word 'always' a trigger for the preterit or imperfect?", "does the word 'when' have anything to do with choosing preterit or imperfect?". These statements reveal student's thinking which will in turn help us address these issues the very first time we present the difference between preterit and imperfect. Also when students disagreed with their conjugations we were able to witness their thought processes coming together to arrive at one conclusion as a group.

Finding/Discussion: When analyzing any foreign language it is helpful to look at how the students arrived at the conclusion they did and if their native language impeded them from doing it correctly. At times we witnessed students almost paralyzed by the inability to leave behind their native language when analyzing verb uses in Spanish but we also saw many examples of them using their native language in a way that was helpful to understanding Spanish. 2 of the first 3 verbs (querer and conocer) change meanings from preterit to imperfect and we witnessed students saying aloud that, "if we think it means 'to know' then it should be

imperfect but if we want it to mean 'to meet' we need to conjugate it in the preterit".

We think that student's learning was directly enhanced by the ability to have the rules explained to them in a clear and concise way and most importantly being able to discuss it amongst themselves so they could arrive at their own conclusions on how the rules fit. We were able to view a few concepts that confused them such as the use of "always" and "when" and their relation to choosing between preterit and imperfect. We were able to explain to them that if something "always" happens then it is most likely a repeated action, which fits nicely into the rules for the imperfect. We were able to give them a few concrete examples of when the word "when" would require preterit or imperfect. We can use this information now to give students this information at the beginning in the same context that was confusing to other students.

We would recommend decreasing the overall number of verbs to conjugate in the paragraph in order to fit it into a 55-minute class and give more time for discussion. In both classes we had to cut discussion short in order to fit everything into the one class. Another limitation we had was that there were only 2 of us teaching this specific class at the time of the Lesson Study therefore we weren't able to listen in on all student discussions.

2. se llamaba
3. conocí
4. vino
5. explicó
6. era
7. iba
8. quería
9. teníamos
10. pasábamos
11. gustaba
12. fuimos
13. recordó
14. era
15. nadaba
16. iba
17. chocó

Rules:

1. Descripción. (used to be)
2. Descripción. No hay acción
3. Es una acción completada
4. Es una acción completada.
5. La acción terminó. No es habitual
6. Es descripción. Es origen
7. Es una acción en progreso
8. Es un estado mental
9. Es descripción
10. Es una acción habitual (repetida)
11. Es una acción habitual
12. Es un acción terminada
13. La acción terminó
14. Es descripción de una característica
15. Es una acción en progreso (simuláneo)
16. Es otra acción en progreso (simultáneo)
17. Tiempo definido en el pasado