

SECOND LANGUAGE VOCABULARY  
DEVELOPMENT IN FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to examine how foreign language teachers develop the second language vocabulary of their students in the classroom. The literature on this topic includes a wide variety and large history of approaches and theories related to learning a language and its vocabulary. However, this study aimed to understand how these theories are carried out by teachers within the confinements and challenges of the foreign language classrooms in the U.S. realistically on an everyday basis. Through interviews with three Spanish as a Foreign Language teachers, the researcher questioned them about their own experience learning a second language, their personal beliefs on how students learn vocabulary, how they make meaning of vocabulary for their students, and what challenges they face when teaching vocabulary. The results indicate that participants emphasized a belief in implicit and natural instruction of vocabulary; however, because of limitations such as time and motivation of the students, participants tended to use a large repertoire of strategies in order to help their students learn vocabulary.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Language educators often face undue pressure and language learners may face unreasonable expectations when unrealistic language outcomes are set for achievement in short periods of instructional time. Students require carefully planned and well-sequenced learning opportunities that provide practice in using the language in order to internalize language competencies.”*  
(ACTFL, 2015, p.2)

As the quote above projects, language teachers face large challenges when teaching their students a foreign language. Language learning is a long process. It takes multiple exposures and extensive practice to become proficient in a language, and a plethora of research has examined the best way for learners to more efficiently reach proficiency in a second language. As the world becomes more of a global community, there is a need to know how students can better learn a second language to participate on an international level. Vocabulary is an essential component to language learning and is therefore a focus of second language learning. While many language learning theories exist (Yanhua, 2014; Demirezen, 1988; Asher, 1969; Krashen, 1989; Yingyu, 2015), there is, however, not much research on how teachers take these theories into consideration when actually planning lessons and accounting for the different challenges of the foreign language classroom specifically. This study intends to provide insight on how foreign language teachers develop target language vocabulary in their classrooms. Instead of focusing on how exactly students learn vocabulary, this study aims to examine how foreign language educators apply these theories in practice through lesson plans and lesson delivery. Many theories today (Krashen, 1989; Yingyu, 2015; Mitchell, 1994) encourage teachers to use more implicit strategies, teaching language naturally, like one would teaching a child a first language. However, in an average foreign language

classroom, students often lack the exposure time, resources, and same need-based motivation to gain this proficiency (Crooks, 1997). How then do teachers face these obstacles and put these theories into practice in order to teach their students vocabulary? And what does vocabulary development look like realistically in the average foreign language classroom in the U.S.? Through interviews, the researcher questioned veteran teachers about their personal experiences regarding planning and implementing lessons on vocabulary, including their own experience learning a second language and the challenges they face in teaching a foreign language. Based on the data from these interviews, the researcher illuminates the discrepancies, similarities, contradictions, and applications of the teaching of vocabulary in second language classrooms.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary development is regarded as an integral aspect of second language acquisition (Radwan & Rikala-Boyer, 2011; Silvestri, 2015), with Knight (1994) claiming it as the single most important aspect of foreign language learning. As Wilken's (1972) historical comment still stands, "while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p.11). Silvestri (2015) describes the seriousness of vocabulary development by comparing it to the development of a young child learning his or her first language: Students with smaller vocabularies often have trouble reading, communicating, and learning more words. Because of this, vocabulary development is also an essential for students learning their second language.

For the purpose of this study, "vocabulary" refers to the knowledge of words and word meanings individuals must know to communicate effectively in the target language by listening, speaking, reading and writing (Muscle, 2006). However, vocabulary is

multifaceted in the way that it requires more than memorization of word meanings.

According to Richards (1976), the nature of vocabulary learning is dense and includes many integral parts. For him, knowing a word entails knowing the following: the degree of probability of encountering that word in speech or print, the limitations on the use of the word, its syntactic behavior, the underlying form of the word and derivations that can be made from it, the network of associations with other words in the language, the semantic value of the word, and different meanings associated with the word. In this way, teaching vocabulary also becomes multifaceted and moves beyond teaching memorization.

Learning vocabulary also proves to be a process. According to Ostovar-Namaghi (2015), learning foreign language vocabulary is a five-step process:

1. Having sources for encountering new words
2. Getting a clear image, either visual or auditory or both, of the forms of the new words
3. Learning the meaning of the words
4. Making a strong memory connection between the forms and meanings of the words
5. Using the words (p. 2061)

Vocabulary, then, moves past isolated terms with clear definitions, but instead are essential and changing parts that interact with the whole language. For this reason, foreign language teachers must dedicate huge efforts into developing the vocabulary of the students.

### **Earlier Vocabulary Development Theories**

Because vocabulary is so fundamental to language development, numerous address how people learn language and vocabulary (Yanhua, 2014; Demirezen, 1988; Asher, 1969; Krashen, 1989; Yingyu, 2015). Theories and models of second language



acquisition have endured a long history of constant changes and improvements. In fact, vocabulary has not always played a huge role in language acquisition. According to Ostovar-Namaghi (2013), traditionally, syllabus designers marginalized the role of vocabulary, with foreign language textbooks being most specific about reading, speaking, and grammar. At that point, vocabulary had a peripheral role. In addition, Khamesipour (2015) claims that vocabulary teaching has often been somewhat ignored in language programs, but today there is a new interest in teaching and learning it. In addition to these beliefs, many theories have come along with ideas about how students learn vocabulary as well as language as a whole.

One theory of second language acquisition, Grammar Translation (Yanhua, 2014), derived from Latin and Greek instruction, focuses on translating the target language back to the native tongue. According to Yanhua (2014), students are encouraged only to translate written texts. Teachers are the authorities in the classroom and students are to learn and commit to memory long lists of vocabulary words and grammar rules. Students learn in controlled environments and have little contact with native speakers of the language or language use out of context. Looking back, critiques of this theory include an emphasis on language knowledge, but not language skills. Thus, students are able to write and translate, but have practically no speaking capabilities (Yanhua, 2014). While this theory is out of date, its roots run deep in foreign language instruction.

As a learning theory, behaviorism influences instruction in schools, and also second language instruction. With its emphasis on repetition, drill and practice, and rewards, behaviorism influenced language acquisition in the following teaching

methods: audio-lingualism, direct teaching and mastery learning, and Total Physical Response (TPR). According to Demirezen (1988), audio-lingualism is habit formation in which correct pronunciation is emphasized through repetitive training drills to learn vocabulary. While this method results in students being able to speak in the target language, it fails to allow curiosity on the part of the student and limits exposure to the contexts of the language. On the same note, behaviorism leads to teaching language by dividing it into small units and using rote memorization to make meaning. Learning is sequential and regularly tested, however students have little opportunity for creativity, exploration or student input in their own learning. Taking behaviorism in a more positive direction, Asher's (1969) Total Physical Response involves students responding to an oral command that is simultaneously being modeled. Eventually students are able to follow commands as a group and then to the command alone. This form of language learning is associated with early stages of second-language learning and promotes student understanding. In general, traces of all of these methods and theories are still in affect today in many foreign language programs. Additionally, many of these methods are still used to teach vocabulary.

### **Explicit Versus Implicit Instruction**

The National Reading Panel (2001) identified multiple ways to teach vocabulary, with the two main methods being explicit and implicit instruction. When a teacher utilizes explicit instruction, the goal is focus the learner's attention on specific words to be taught, to define or translate them, and to memorize their meanings (Khamesipour, 2015). This method involves seeing vocabulary words alone before seeing them in context. Further, many of the early language learning theories utilize explicit instruction,

emphasizing vocabulary words in isolation and memorizing their meaning. In contrast, the goal of implicit instruction is to focus the learner's attention elsewhere and provide multiple exposures in different contexts in which the meanings of new words are acquired subconsciously (Radwan & Rikala-Boyer, 2011). Deliberately learning words is not always included, but instead listening to words in context and inferring their meaning takes place naturally and through repeated exposure to the words (Khamesipour, 2015). In Khamesipour's study (2015), the group of second-language learners learning vocabulary implicitly outscored their peers being taught vocabulary explicitly and also improved more dramatically from their pre-tests to post-tests. Additionally, implicit learning is often viewed as "the default mode of learning, that happens unintentionally, unconsciously and most frequently as part of our daily experience" (Reber, 1993, p.163). Vocabulary instruction has also shown to be beneficial through studies of study abroad students who learn vocabulary implicitly by immersion and improve significantly in their depth of vocabulary (Jiménez, 2010). For this reason, current second language acquisition theories have shifted to a view that holds implicit instruction more superior when learning vocabulary.

### **Current Theories to Aid Vocabulary Development**

At the root of implicit learning is Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1989), which states that if students are exposed to vocabulary words multiple times in different contexts, the meaning of the words will be acquired subconsciously. In education today, Krashen's theories are generally held in high esteem. Throughout his five core hypotheses, Krashen believes that people learn their second language naturally and similar to the process of a child internalizing his first language implicitly (Latifi, 2013). The theories promote

meaning-focused communicative activities such as listening, reading, and interaction (Khamesipour, 2015). Proponents of this communicative approach believe that “one needs not understand every word in a spoken or written text for communication to be successful” (Radwan & Rikala-Boyer, 2011, p. 214). Instead, there is an assumption that a reader is likely to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from context. Krashen (1989) also believes that people acquire language only when they understand what people tell them and what they need. Therefore, this approach teaches words in context, gears it towards the interests on the learner, and encourages active processing. Krashen’s language theories have also been a starting point for many other popular theories today.

In second language education today, the idea of strategy training has become popular. This approach is against the practice of giving students long lists of de-contextualized words for memorization. Instead, Ostovar-Namaghi (2013) urges educators to take the time and teach the important processes and strategies of vocabulary development in order to move students towards independence and proficiency. Strategies include using the words in multiple contexts and ways to remember the different complexities of the specific words. In a study of two groups, the group that received vocabulary strategy training significantly outperformed the group that learned vocabulary through traditional activities prescribed by the textbook (Ostovar-Namaghi, 2013). Additionally, students who receive strategy training acquire more words quicker and with more depth. They also correlate with greater active self-directed learner involvement and greater self-confidence. Because a greater strategy repertoire determines the breadth and depth of a learner’s vocabulary, strategy training is now viewed as an inseparable part of vocabulary teaching.

While popular in all forms of education, the constructivist method has also become important to the field of language study. Constructivists claim that the traditional model of teaching vocabulary attaches too much importance to the teacher's role and neglects the student's creativity and activeness (Yingyu, 2015). This results in students memorizing words in isolation and hinders their ability to speak and write with fluency. They call for a need to change vocabulary from a passive rote memorization to a more active stance that turns students into active meaning-makers. The use of constructivism in foreign language relies on Vygotsky's most well-known concept of zone of proximal development (Williams & Burden, 1997). It suggests that teachers should set the task level just above what students are capable of understanding and then "teach principles that will allow them to take the next step unassisted" (Yingyu, 2015, p.641). In this way, the teacher provides questions and students provide examples and contexts in which to use the words. Through this interaction, students learn the meanings of the words as well as their related contexts. The study on constructivism concluded the following:

Only when students' cognitive system is involved in learning, can students have a good command of [vocabulary] words. This interaction is helpful for the students to construct their personal meaning of the words. Only when the students assimilated the words into their own schemata, can they use it freely. (Yingyu, 2013).

In general, constructivists believe that students must have an active role in their own learning and develop the meanings and contexts for vocabulary words on their own.

Recently, the communicative approach has been the approach most accepted by contemporary educators. According the Mitchell (1994), "The rise of the communicative approach can be seen as the response of the language teaching profession to their new situation and a recognition of the inadequacy of traditional grammar translation methods

to meet the needs of their new publics” (p.34). With this approach the competent language user not only commands the grammar and vocabulary of the target language, but also knows how to use this knowledge in a range of different situations. Educators teach this approach through language-appropriate and relevant topics and using frequent assessment and providing focused practice on language points and feedback to learners. For example, language items are grouped into grammatical categories such as “thanking someone” or “requesting information” (Mitchell, 1994). Therefore, the goal is communication and not necessarily perfection. Generally, many modern day educators believe that this approach is most appropriate to instruct foreign language learners.

### **Popular Teacher Resources for Vocabulary Development**

Throughout the past few decades, theories on language acquisition have generally shifted to a more active role for the student and required more from the teacher than simply handing out vocabulary lists for memorization. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) provides in its *Performance Descriptors*, a roadmap for teaching and learning. Its goal is to help language educators create performance tasks targeted at the appropriate performance range, and how to scaffold them to the next level. It describes the domains of performance and assesses how well learners are to be understood and to understand vocabulary, measuring how extensive and applicable the learner’s vocabulary is. This gives language teachers an idea about what they should be doing in the classroom. According to ACTFL (2016),

Educators use these performance outcomes as the starting point for planning instruction, in a backward design model. With a clear focus on what performance activities should look like at the end of a unit, instructional and practice activities drive toward those outcomes. This outline describes the range of performance broadly enough for instructors to adapt to

language learners of all ages. (ACTFL, 2016, p.16)

This design also promotes scaffolding by pre-teaching critical elements first and then allowing learners to dive into context with support and then gradually over time become able to perform on their own. ACTFL provides a guideline for teachers of foreign language to use; however, there are a few common themes for teachers to be using in their classroom to teach vocabulary.

One of these suggested techniques is the use of concept or semantic mapping in order for students to gain vocabulary proficiency. Semantic mapping is defined as a “visual representation of knowledge or a picture of conceptual relationships” (Radwan & Rikah-Boyer, 2011, p.215). To do this learners must create categories for their vocabulary and then group words and associations to be represented visually using a diagram or a map to help establish word relationships. This process avoids treating words as isolated units and places them as part of a working system. When using this model, teachers encourage students to make meaningful personal connections with their words as a technique as well. The goal is to create connections between topics and words and then connections to their everyday lives. For example, Dr. Heidi Brynes (2004) of Georgetown University promotes a full literacy approach in which the curriculum of language studies revolves around different thematic units and topics. In this way, vocabulary is learned through reading and writing different authentic resources around the same topic. Vocabulary words learned in a particular unit are then all related and learned in context.

Another technique teachers are urged to do is to conduct their classroom in the target language as often as possible. ACTFL’s (2016) position statement sets the goal of

90% or more of the class in the target language by the teacher and the learners, both inside and outside of the classroom. This position comes from the belief that the more extensive the students' exposure to the target language, the better their acquisition of the target language ought to be (Méndez, 2015). Their goal is to create a word-rich environment that maintains multiple practices and exposures to words in order for deep and rich vocabulary learning to occur (Yahia, 2013). For example, Andrea Blythe, a presenter at the 2015 Texas Foreign Language Association Conference, strives to conduct her middle school classroom in Spanish from the very first day. She teaches vocabulary by providing visuals and gesturing, and by using a method called the circle of questioning. The circling of question involves asking questions, either/or statements, and guiding her students to be able to understand what she is talking about and produce it. She believes that by using the target language the students are more active to try to understand, and believes that "the brain that does the work is the brain that retains the work" (Blythe, 2015).

As in all education, technology is also strongly encouraged to help students of foreign language to learn vocabulary and become more proficient. According to Vekler (2004), future foreign language teachers must integrate technology into their curriculum to enhance student proficiency because it offers vast possibilities for language development and connection to the cultures of the world where the target language is spoken. While engaging students, technology also offers the possibility of learning vocabulary in authentic contexts, along with multiple strategies to apply to the learning process.

In general, the role of teachers of foreign languages has shifted in recent years to



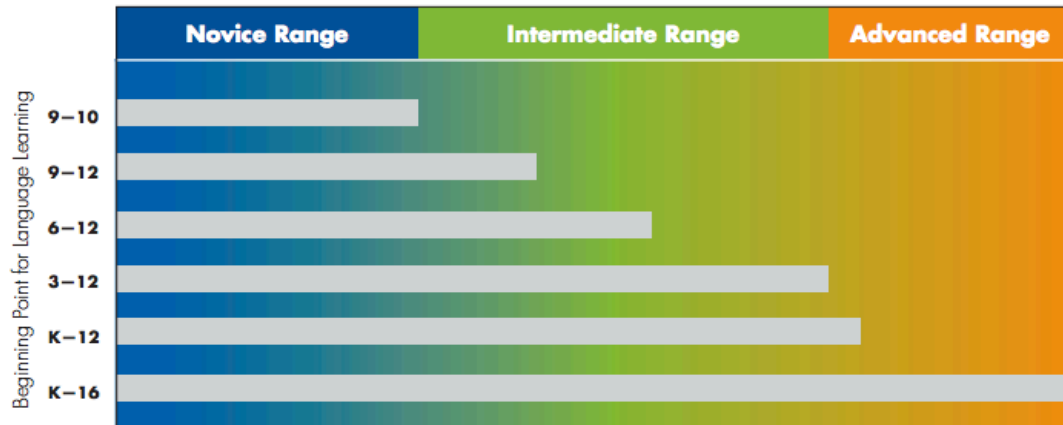
be that of a facilitator. The language teachers of today are suggested to act as facilitators, helpers, and advisors, responsible for identifying students' learning strategies, conducting training, and helping learners to become more independent. While there are many theories of how students learn vocabulary and language, Brown (2007) states that teachers and researchers found no single research method would guarantee universal success. Individual learning and teaching styles can and should be taken into consideration in foreign language learning, as well as considering the use of more than one method. The role of the teacher is then to make decisions about what is best for his or her own classroom and set of learners.

### **Foreign Language as an Elective**

While there appears to be a plethora of research on language and vocabulary learning in second languages, teaching a foreign language in the average American public school can have a very different set of circumstances. According to the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (2010), most states have legislation in place that requires students to take 1-2 years of a foreign language before graduation, with individual high schools often requiring more. Because of this, many students do not have an immediate need or desire to become proficient in the language, but instead wish to do well in the class or simply earn a credit (Stewart-Strobelt, 2003). Additionally foreign language is considered to be an elective, and can often be overshadowed by other "core" subjects that are tested on state standardized exams. Finally, instruction time comes into play as one of the most important factors and challenges of foreign language classrooms. ACTFL (2016) states that "time on task is a critical factor in developing performance" (p.8). Because students spend a limited amount of time in their classes, this may affect

how they are able to learn the language. In the Figure 1 below, ACTFL demonstrates how the time spent in the classroom affects the proficiency level reached by students:

Figure 1: Time as a critical component for developing language performance



As can be seen in the first row, students only enrolled in language class their first two years of high school, often stay within the novice range of performance standards. This changes much of what teachers are able to accomplish and the potential students are able to reach. These unique circumstances have many implications on language acquisition and teaching in the foreign language classroom, as well as how much vocabulary and proficiency students can acquire as a base for the target language.

As the research shows, the history of language learning theories is long and continually changing. Many different approaches have risen in popularity throughout time. However, there appears to not be an extensive amount of research on how foreign language teachers take these theories, both their own personal theories and those recommended to them, and incorporate those into lesson plans, activities, and assessments to be used in their own classroom given their individual restraints and challenges in the classroom setting. Therefore, this study aims to examine how vocabulary instruction occurs on an authentic everyday level in foreign language

classrooms.

### METHODS

This study is a qualitative in nature and based on three separate one-time interviews with foreign language teachers. The following sections discuss the various procedural components of this study:

#### **Research Questions**

This study attempts to address the following question: "How do foreign language teachers teach vocabulary in their classrooms?" Some of the sub questions included:

1. How do teachers develop vocabulary in the face of the challenges of the foreign language classroom? (i.e.- time, lack of motivation, etc.)
2. How do teachers put current language theories into practice in their classroom?
3. What vocabulary development strategies do teachers find to be the most and least effective?
4. How do teachers utilize their resources to teach vocabulary?

#### **Participants**

Three participants were voluntarily selected through purposive sampling. Recruitment began in October 2015 and the participants were invited to the study via email correspondence. All three participants were currently working as foreign language educators at the secondary level for at least three years at all different high schools and districts. They were chosen based on their background knowledge and professional experience with teaching vocabulary in a foreign language classroom, as well as through

professional relationships with the researcher during her time as a pre-service and clinical teacher. They will henceforth be referred to as Participant A, Participant B, and Participant C.

### *Demographics*

The population for this study includes Participant A, a male Spanish teacher and soccer coach at a public high school in the Southwest region of the United States. Participant A holds a bachelor's degree in Spanish and Business, and earned his teaching certification through an alternate certification program after a career switch. He has been teaching 10 years, all at the high school level. His school serves students at a lower than average socioeconomic status. He is a native Spanish speaker and specializes in teaching heritage speakers of the language at lower levels.

Participant B, a female Spanish teacher and student council advisor at a public high school in the Southwest region, has a bachelor's degree in Spanish and Education and master's degree in Education. She has been teaching for 12 years at the same high school, where she also attended high school. She is a non-native Spanish speaker and learned Spanish through formal instruction as well as several study abroad trips in Spain. She specializes in teaching Spanish levels 2 and 3 at a highly rated high school with students of a higher than average socioeconomic status.

Participant C, a female Spanish teacher at a public high school in the Southwest region, has a degree in Spanish and Education and has been teaching for 14 years. She specializes in bilingual education and taught a dual language elementary class 10 years before switching to high school, where she has been for the past 4 years in two different districts. She is a native Spanish speaker and specializes in teaching Spanish 1 and 2 as

well as the Advanced Placement class for native speakers.

### *Purposive Samplings*

All three participants were chosen based on their experience in the foreign language classroom as well as their reputations as effective teachers. Participant A and Participant C both served as the researcher's cooperating teacher during her time as a pre-service teacher. Both were assigned to her based on the recommendations of administrators and colleagues, as well as their willingness to work with pre-service teachers. During her time in their classrooms, the researcher found them to have both excellent relationships with their students as well as an ability to teach their language effectively to all students. Participant B was the researcher's high school Spanish teacher, whom continues to mentor her and remain in contact with.

## **Procedure**

### *Data Sources*

Data collection came from three separate interviews with three foreign language teachers. The researcher personally contacted the participants, gained written consent, and set up individual interviews at mutually convenient times. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes and were held in local public places outside of school property. The interviewer followed a semi-structured interview with a set protocol that can be found in Appendix A, but also added additional questions where needed. Two audio recorders were used to record each interview which were transcribed for data analysis and to accurately represent the participants' responses.

Participants were asked to share their backgrounds as a teacher and professional as well as their background with languages they had learned and can speak. They were

then asked about the role vocabulary plays in their classroom and personal practices and beliefs regarding vocabulary, as well as tools used in lesson planning and classrooms. They were asked to share both successful and unsuccessful experiences in the classroom and reflect back on their own teaching and challenges.

### *Data Analysis*

After completing all three interviews, each interview was transcribed from the audiotaped recordings by the researcher. The researcher then examined the three interviews together to search for commonalities and drew common trends that answered the research questions.

### *Credibility and Validity*

To ensure credibility and truthfulness in the present study, the researcher utilized member checking, direct quotations, and use of additional observations and artifacts. After the interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings, participants were asked to review the material to ensure it was an accurate representation of their thoughts and opinions. None of the participants wished to clarify or add to their interviews, and did not feel as if they had been misrepresented. Additionally, direct quotations are used throughout the study in their original form in order to preserve the imperfections and authenticity of what was said. Further, the researcher had informally observed each of the participants previous to their interviews and had seen their teaching in action. Participant C also provided a teaching artifact she felt represented her regular vocabulary practices.

### **Limitations**

Because of the nature of this study, the findings are limited and should not be generalized. Only three professionals participated in this study, and therefore the results

are limited to their opinion and experience. The participants were all from different countries of origin and varied between native-Spanish speakers and native-English speakers. They also differed in their levels of education and paths to teacher certification. Despite their differences, all were high school Spanish teachers in the Southwest region of the United States, although from different districts. While the reason for this was simply the availability to the researcher, it would be interesting to view how results would compare to teachers of other foreign languages in schools as well as from other parts of the country. Additionally, all participants taught in public schools, however all of the schools did have resources more or less. These similarities of participants may have contributed to their similarities of responses in their respective interviews.

Furthermore, this study relied on the self-reporting of the teachers on their own lesson plans, practices, and beliefs. While the researcher has spent time in each of the participants' classrooms, the main purpose was not for research. Because of the limitation of variation and amount of participants, this study is limited in its scope and depth. Including more participants from different areas, languages, and with more diverse schools would broaden this study.

### FINDINGS

With all different backgrounds, each participant had different views and different ways of helping their students develop vocabulary. Each teacher approached lesson planning, assessment, and how they taught with different mindsets and beliefs. All participants were asked as a basis about their own experience learning a second language, their beliefs about learning vocabulary, how they introduce and assess vocabulary in the classroom, and any challenges they face. The researcher intended questions to assess the

teacher's beliefs on how students learn vocabulary and then how that comes in fruition in their lesson planning and teaching.

### **Participant A**

With 10 years of experience, Participant A has taught every level of Spanish in the public school setting. He most enjoys getting to speak his language and getting to teach his culture. He enjoys working with students in the classroom and also coaching soccer. At the time of the interview, his students spent around 40 minutes a day in his classroom for five days a week.

#### *Experience learning a second language*

As a native to Bolivia, Participant A moved to America at age 10. He found learning English to be an easy process once he was forced to learn in it. He stated,

We took English since the day we walked into school in Bolivia. It was not a requirement to pass it to move to the next grade level so, I didn't pass those English classes. (A1.1)

And,

I learned the basics in the classroom, but it wasn't enough to communicate. It was enough to say 'spoon', 'fork', 'knife'...because I wanted to eat. And then um, I guess the words that I knew were from music, because you wanted to sing the music, even though you didn't know what the words were saying, the music was cool, so you repeated it and learned that way. (A1.2)

While he did take many classes to learn English, he found the simple immersion of making friends and living in America helped him learn English the most. He claims to have become fluent in English within a year of moving to the United States, and only 6 months to be able to communicate effectively. When commenting about his experience learning English, he added,



It's survival of the fittest. You don't learn it, you won't be able to communicate, so you learn it quickly. And I guess that's why in Spanish [class] it's kind of the opposite because it's 45 minutes, and then you go back to English (A1.2)

In general, Participant A displayed a belief in the importance of immersion in language learning. He felt that because he was young and felt as though he had no other choice to learn English, it came quickly and without difficulty. He displayed a large awareness of the difference between his experience learning English and his students' experience learning Spanish.

### *Beliefs and Practices*

Participant A expressed the belief that vocabulary is the most important part of learning a second language. He stated,

To me it's the most important thing. And the reason I say that is because you didn't really learn grammar when you were learning English as a baby, you didn't learn sentence structure. We just repeated everything that is said, so we build vocabulary that way.(A1.2)

When asked how students generally learn vocabulary, he expressed that students learn ideally through repetition paired with the visual aspect of language. When all five senses are involved, learning occurs and vocabulary makes more sense.

At the time of the interview, Participant A's curriculum divides vocabulary up into two lists for every six week grading period. This means that every three weeks, the students have a new list of vocabulary words to learn and be tested on. Participant A introduces the words by displaying the list on Powerpoint and having students make flashcards. His original intention was to have students copy vocabulary and definitions by hand, but he switched to allowing the students to use Quizlet, or online flashcards,

because of their personal preference. While he believes “[with writing it] you tend to remember it more than you do by typing it’ (A1.3), he has found that students are studying more on their own using Quizlet and therefore they tend to do better on exams.

Once vocabulary words are introduced, Participant A reports three main strategies to help students learn the word meanings: Using the words in context and sentences, linking the words to something relatable, and the use of mnemonic devices and word relationships.

He wishes to help students understand the differences in meanings of vocabulary words depending on how they are used. He reported,

I’ll introduce [the words] on the first day. And so every time we do something in class, we use those words. And I always bring it back to that. Like remember this word, we talked about it, if it’s used this way it’s this, but if it’s used in this manner it means that. Because everything has multiple meanings depending how it’s used. And we’ll reinforce it that way(A1.3)

By using the words in context, he hopes to help the students learn more than just the direct translation. He also wishes for his students to link what they are learning to their everyday lives and the world around him. He reported connecting vocabulary words with relevant concepts, places, and characters that the students could remember from their everyday lives. For example, Participant A stated,

I’ll use them in sentences and context, and the other thing is, we’ll find the cognates, or we’ll find something that’s funny about the word to relate it to. You know, something they can remember. Like lately, because again I don’t watch these shows. Dora the Explorer. ‘I learned it on Dora the Explorer, that’s where I saw it!’ So two or three days later when we go back to that word they’re like ‘Coach we don’t remember that word.’ I’m like, yeah you do, remember Dora the Explorer? That’s how we link it to something they can relate to. (A1.3)

And,

Relate it things they want to use it. It's kind of like the first 6 weeks, a lot of the words we were learning, they were having a hard time, but they weren't realizing that they knew over half the words already, because they weren't seeing the cognates behind them. Basic words, you know, tacos, burritos, you use those on a daily basis in Texas. You know, or, we found words that they use on a daily basis in the English language, that they already know, which helped build their confidence. And then we use words that they use on the daily basis that may not be a cognate, but they use it because they are here. Like for example, tacos are cognates we use in the language, but bueno...what is bueno? Well, you eat it. Taco Bueno. Oh ok, the restaurant, so then they remember the word Bueno with the restaurant, and then I taught them the word malo, because I said I think it should be called Taco Malo. Malo means bad, because to me they're not good tacos, but bueno means good. (A1.7)

This along with other basic mnemonic devices, assist the students in learning their vocabulary lists. Because the students are responsible for two different vocabulary lists in a six week grading term, it is important for them to be continually studying all the words by establishing connections between the two lists. For example, Participant A stated,

We'll introduce the new set, but we'll start using that new set with the old vocabulary words as well. So everything is linking to itself. So we'll use a different vocabulary word in the sentence, but instead of just ending the sentence with 'me gusta esquiar', we'll end it with 'me gusta esquiar...y correr', and correr will be from the first set...and it keeps them studying (A1.3)

While much of the vocabulary learning in Participant A's classroom relies on memorization, many strategies are used to help students relate their words and move beyond simple memorization of the English translation of the word. Likewise, Participant A strives to be flexible in his teaching style,

So we try to find ways to help learning, or if someone comes up with a different way we'll share it with the class [because] somebody might learn it that way. (A1.3)

Participant A gives a comprehensive exam over both sets of vocabulary at the end of six

weeks, while also giving short vocabulary quizzes throughout the grading period. He changes the format of the quizzes every time. For example, sometimes they get the Spanish word and they have to write the English word. Other times it is fill in the blank or giving the word for a picture, although different perspectives makes this form difficult to grade. With the constant changing of quiz form, Participant A intends for the students to learn the words in many different contexts and uses and not simply direct translation.

### *Challenges*

When asking about the biggest challenges in teaching vocabulary and a second language, Participant A reported most challenges to fall in the following two categories: Motivation of the students and moving students past recognition of words and into proficiency. Participant A gave his perspective on foreign language classrooms and the attitudes of his students. He described his students' motivation and attitudes in the following ways:

The culture of the kids, it's the 'I don't need a second language', 'I'm just taking it because I have to'...so getting them to actually sit and learn something and see how it can help them and get how they can actually enjoy it (A1.1)

And,

It's like if there's not a reward at the end, they're not going to do it (A1.3)

While Participant A has an obvious passion for his language and for his students, he finds that many students do not pick up the language, much less vocabulary, because of their beliefs about foreign language and their perceived need for it. In the same way, the motivation of the students limits what will work to teach them. His goal is to make students recognize the words and be able to understand and write them. Often, he has

found that students will not move past that. Participant A expressed a belief in repetition as the key to learning vocabulary, however, difficulties arose when students started to feel awkward:

The problem is most kids don't have the patience to repeat it. Just like you can teach them 'Hola', and unless they repeat it, they're never gonna learn it. And they feel dorky or uncool if they sit there and repeat after you...things like that. 'Coach, I'm too grown up for this, this is first grade stuff.' But you kind of are in a first grade class, with the repetition" (A1.2)

Therefore, Participant A encounters difficulty when moving students past memorization and recognition of vocabulary words. He states,

So most of them are able to identify the word if I say it or if they see it. Now then saying it and writing it, it just depends on the individual kid's level. And from what I've seen, it's how much they want to learn language (A1.4)

In general, Participant A expresses a sense of empathy when relating to his students.

Relating back to his own experience having to learn English, he recognizes a dislike for learning in the classroom and did not start to truly learn how to communicate in a second language until there was an obvious and immediate need for it. Therefore, he attempts to build confidence in his students by doing what he can. He also reported a passion for sharing his culture and engages the students in culture projects and presentations every six weeks in order to create an excitement and desire to travel to Spanish speaking countries, thus creating a motivation to learn the language. Participant A added at the end of his interview the following final remarks:

If I could take them abroad for three months, that'd be the best way. Honestly, survival of the fittest, so, because there's no need for them to learn it, because they go right back to English. So it's like me, as soon as English class is over, I was talking Spanish when I was in school. So I can see, that's why I can't really get mad because I see their point of view, like... yeah I didn't want to learn English too. (A1.8)

### **Participant B**

Participant B has taught high school Spanish at the same public high school for 12 years. During her time teaching she has taught the beginning and intermediate levels of Spanish. She became a foreign language teacher because of her love for the subject and an inspiring teacher she had while in high school. She believes that teaching a language provides an avenue to be able to talk to students about life and make connections across cultures and lives. In addition to sharing her love of Spanish and Spain, Participant B is also in charge of the student council. At the time of the interview, her students spent 3 to 5 hours in her classroom each week, due to block scheduling. Her class periods last 1 hour and 20 minutes and occur either twice or three times in a week.

#### *Experience learning a second language*

Participant B is a non-native Spanish speaker and speaks English as her primary language. She learned Spanish through formal study in middle school and high school. She then majored in Spanish in college and studied abroad in Madrid, Spain for a semester. She also continued to travel to Spain for several summers to continue learning and speaking the language. However, she claimed to have learned more Spanish as she taught it in the classroom,

Learning language is a long process and there's ah, vocabulary you continue to build once you've established a base, and you have more ability to add more to it. Um, the more you use it, the more in depth, you live, the more you practice it, the more second nature grammar becomes. And also the more contact you have with the language and people who speak the language, the more you begin to understand nuance, and the way it's actually used with native speakers. (B1.1)

In general, Participant B believes she has an ear for languages and that the process of learning a second language was easier for her than for others.

*Beliefs and Practices*

Participant B shares the outlook that vocabulary is the most important part of language when it comes to speaking and using the language. Meanwhile, she believes that the vocabulary given to her by the curriculum is not always important. Instead, vocabulary that is relatable and important to the person is most critical to learn,

I think sometimes curriculum decides that a certain set of vocabulary is useful, but it's really not relevant. And I wouldn't necessarily...I don't worry if my students don't master those words...at the level that they're at. But I think words that enable them to have conversations and to talk about themselves and their lives and their experiences—those are, if they don't master those words they can't have those conversations, or they can't write about them, or understand other people who are trying to share their experiences. (B1.2)

When asked how students learn vocabulary in general, she related it back to her own experience learning language and raising a child. She displayed a natural approach to learning vocabulary, similar to the way people learn their first language as children. She responds,

Um, I think the best way is to hear the word and see the...see what it belongs to. Or to hear it in context and start to discern meaning because, ah, my three year old does not translate a word from English to Spanish. He sees a chair and knows it's a chair. And so I think that's the best way. I think the traditional, here's what it means in English here's what it means in Spanish, is fine, but not natural. (B1.2)

She maintains this belief in a more natural approach when introducing vocabulary.

Participant B looks at the theme of the words and finds ways to demonstrate in an interactive, repetitive, and contextual way first. She states,

It really depends on what it's about. So if I can introduce with pictures or images, I do that because that would be just like learning as a child. Um, or if the words don't... aren't conducive to images or actual objects, like a lot of verbs... ah if there's an action, I can do an action to that, or I'll try to explain the word in Spanish using other Spanish words they know to help them get the idea, and then eventually I give them the actual definition, but try to help them get it naturally first. (B1.2)

Additionally, in lesson planning she first considers what she would like the end result to be or what she would like the students to be able to do with the words. She considers if the words should be stored in to the long-term memory or if they are words that don't carry as much weight. From there, she looks at how the vocabulary can fit with the grammar and then what type of imagery or context can be given to the words (B1.4). She then decides what activities she can do to portray the words best for students. She responded that it "all depends on what the end goal of the unit is" (B1.4).

While looking forward to assessment, Participant B also strives to keep vocabulary words in context and avoid direct translating. Participant B stated that "every quiz that I have that is over vocabulary is completely in context and asks students to do things with the words" (B1.2). For example, she commonly uses fill-in-the-blank quizzes, giving definitions in Spanish, or anything that tests more than if students know the direct, single translation. Participant B indicated that the way she introduces vocabulary now has changed over her time as a teacher. She said, "I think it surprises me to see the work I did when I was a first, second year teacher and see how poorly I would consider it to be" (B1.1).

When looking at practicing vocabulary, Participant B acknowledges the importance of moving through certain stages of learning vocabulary. For example, students must be able to recognize words before they are able to say the word and then use it in context. Therefore, Participant B's activities follow a progression and she guides students to become familiar with the words she teaches. She says,

You know, there's always dumb games that help kids remember the words or recognize the words. Because there's the different stages, right? You



have to be able to recognize the word before you can recall it and before you can reproduce it, so a fun, you know the stupid fly swatter game is always a fun recognition game... (B1.3)

Generally, Participant B believes that students learn vocabulary best when they have a personal connection and learn how to say the words that relate to their own lives and would help them communicate with others. In that sense, she finds those words more important to learn than what the curriculum and units offer. For example, Participant B responds when asked about her methods to make meaning out of new vocabulary words,

Um, but it helps, stick with kids, helps them recognize the word. I do a lot of, things like where kids are interacting with each other and using the words, um, and that helps them practice in meaningful context... meaningful contextual ways. Ah, I think any time they get to talk about themselves and their own experiences makes it memorable and makes connections and makes it stick more. Which is why when you asked, you know is it important that they master vocabulary... certain things, yes. I don't really care at this season if they master the vocabulary about, you know the environment, because for your average 16-year-old, that makes no connection, but when they get to talk about their childhood and what they did and they watched and they played, oh they could talk for hours. (B1.3)

And,

So, what other things do I like? Speed dating. Ah, it's just, you can change that to any levels. It can be producing a word, giving definitions, but it's funny, it's fun. Anytime you can have teaching include an element of fun or a time limit, it makes it... you know they're more willing to engage in it. (B1.3)

Participant B often works to engage her students in the games and other activities having to do with vocabulary. She appears to have a large repertoire of strategies to practice vocabulary and within a variety of different contexts. When asked if there is a strategy that she has found least effective, she responded that while just telling students the simple definition and translation may be the least effective, that there is a time and place for it. Instead, her approach promotes a belief that all strategies are helpful when exposing

students to the words. For example, she states,

I think that almost anything is good if it's not the only thing. Like a lot of teachers buy into one philosophy or another, like you'll undoubtedly run into the people who belong in the TPR school of thought, and I think TPR is fantastic as one thing—if that were all I did, it would lose it's effectiveness, you know?...Um, but mostly as long as you try a variety of things, I think they're all good. (B1.3)

In addition to her repertoire of activities, she engages the use of technology as her school is in the midst of adopting a 1:1 policy to provide every student with an iPad. Through this technology, she is beginning to incorporate different ways to include images, short videos, and other media that allow students to engage in a new way. She also expresses a possibility of incorporating even more technology in the future to teach and practice vocabulary and gain access to people from other countries.

### *Challenges*

Participant B expressed challenges in the areas of moving passed rote memorization and moving the students towards actually using and speaking the language. While she strives to provide meaning and context to students, she must also provide a fair amount of memorization in the interest of time and because that is how students are used to learning. She remarks,

There has to be a certain amount of repetition and recognition and recall, there has to be because you're learning new words, you know? Um, but to avoid the trap of, you know, here's what the word is in Spanish and what it means in English and move on, but it's just super important to provide them with examples and opportunities to read and listen and to speak using the words the way they'd be used if you spoke Spanish, you know? (B1.5)

With avoiding direct translation, she also hopes her students actually speak Spanish instead of only being able to read and write. However, she reports getting them to

produce Spanish can be a challenging endeavor, but ultimately believes that it is the most useful and important for them. She states,

Now, to speak Spanish, to have them speak Spanish, even as painful as that can be sometimes, the best way to have vocabulary is to prohibit English. Sometimes people are silent, but they are trying to think and that's better. (B1.5)

Participant B also expressed challenges in the limitations of the nature of her classroom.

Because of the amount of time students are in there learning and the reality of how much the students want to learn the language, she finds that she must accommodate her teaching to fit this. At the close of the interview, Participant B shared the following closing remarks:

I think, the best thing to know is to consider, well you have limited time, so while students, you know, I try to consider how kids learn language actually and teach that way, however, a kid learning their first language is constantly surrounded by the input of that language 24/7. A kid earning a second language credit in high school is getting 3-5 hours a week plus whatever time they put in on their homework which could range between 20 minutes to 6 hours depending on the kid, you know, that's not the same and so you can't...I try to teach naturally, but also realizing that, you can't...it's not going to be the same—so you make as many connections as you can because connections are what makes meaning. But you have to do a certain amount of the rote practice, because if you don't they won't...in your limited time, they won't get it. And the perk of high school is that they're capable of rote practice, and they're capable of memorizing, but that won't make it stick, so that's not where I stay. (B1.5)

### **Participant C**

Participant C has 14 years of experience teaching foreign language, although 10 of those years were spent in a bilingual elementary classroom. In her four years teaching high school Spanish she has taught beginning and intermediate levels, all the way up to Native Speakers AP 4 Spanish. Participant C most enjoys sharing her culture and working with adolescents and exposing them to new viewpoints that help promote

growth. Her favorite part of teaching is seeing a student accomplish something they've been working towards and getting to be a part of that. At the time of the interviews, students spent about 45 minutes a day in her classroom for five days a week.

*Experience learning a second language*

Participant C is a native Spanish speaker and learned English when she was 13 and moved to the United States. She reports learning English was a difficult and emotionally trying experience. She states,

I wasn't really given that choice, I had to learn because my parents moved here from another country. I could read and write it well, however I couldn't communicate, so I was forced to do something"(C1.1)

Her process of learning English came with reluctance. However, she attributed much of her difficulty with the language to her adolescent age and attending middle school and high school, in which she felt the need to be accepted, which proved difficult with a language barrier. When asked about her fluency and progression of learning the language, she answered with modesty,

I don't think I'm fluent yet. I would say probably it took me about two years where I felt comfortable to be able to speak. So, in the progression of, ok I know the vocabulary, now I know the grammar, and attempting to speak with fear—I would say about two years is where I didn't really care what I sounded like. I didn't really care whether I was using proper grammar or not. I had to communicate, so I would say the two year mark, but I don't think I'm fluent. (C1.2)

Participant C held strong emotional ties to the learning process and recognized the important role of confidence and willingness to make mistakes as important factors in the process. She reiterated these sentiments when speaking about teaching a language as well.

*Beliefs and Practices*

Participant C strongly indicated a belief that vocabulary is the core of language learning. When asked about the role vocabulary plays in learning a language, she responded,

Oh my gosh, it's essential. It's essential. I mean grammar is important, but at the very least being able to say basic words, even with basic words you can communicate, and if you say just the one word you can...yes, it's, it's, that's the foundation of any language. (C1.2)

In addition, she also felt that repetition was the way students generally learned vocabulary. She added that using the words in sentences or creating visuals for the vocabulary words also helped build meaning for the students. After introducing the vocabulary, she implements an activity that she calls the "tic-tac-toe activity." (see Appendix B) The activity calls for students to complete some sort of vocabulary activity with their current vocabulary list. The activities specialize in repetition and repeated exposure for the students. The students must do three of these activities for daily grades. Participant C reiterates the importance of this activity and others,

...memorization, the tic-tac-toe activity, those are really, really good activities to practice it, and reinforce the vocab, like flashcards, um forming, writing paragraphs, writing sentences, repetition, just constant repetition, but activities that they're able to visualize and see the words being formed. They can get used to you know, remembering. So the strategies would be just the memorization and just the constant exposure to the word in some form. (C1.4)

And,

So you'll have activities that will be sort of recognition of the word to using the words, especially, um, in sentences, like when we're talking about level 1, they should be able to form a sentence and understand whether, ok, this word that I'm using is a subject word, this is a noun word, this is an action word or an adjective word. (C1.3)

Participant C uses this progression in lesson planning. She builds students' ability to recognize the word, and then eventually reproduce it on their own. Her themed curriculum generally has chapters in which she gives one week to vocabulary, one to grammar, and one to a speaking proficiency project combining both. This way, the vocabulary is used throughout the three weeks interacting with all aspects of the language and going beyond isolation. Assessment is usually done through quizzes and unit tests that combine a use of multiple choice questions, fill in the blank, audio activities, and labeling pictures with vocabulary words. It is most important to Participant C that students see vocabulary in many different forms, and again, that repetition is involved.

When asked what activities students enjoy the most, she responds that electronics are very important in her classroom. She answers that apps that are user friendly and simple engage students the most and students enjoy the process more.

Well obviously anything that is done with apps. Anything that is done electronically. That seems to be the most, or, I believe...according to what they say, the most enjoyable (C1.3)

While she finds technology to be the most helpful, she felt that no method was incorrect or least effective. She felt that as long as students were being exposed to words multiple times, they were picking it up and learning it.

### *Challenges*

Participant C expressed challenges in teaching vocabulary and language in the following two areas: Motivation of the students and the inflexibility of curriculum. In terms of motivation, she found the biggest motivation difference between her on-level classes and her PreAP classes. She reported her PreAP students having a stronger desire

to use the language later in life, whereas the on-level students more wanted the credit for the class to fulfill their foreign language credit for high school. She stated,

Motivation for them is definitely...they have different agendas if you will. The regular level tends to be more disconnected to the language, and is more of a chore—an activity that needs to be completed versus the PreAP is application, they're looking to be able to use the words, to be able to interact with it. The regular level doesn't do that. (C1.3)

On the other hand, Participant C expressed a desire to be to do more interactive games and activities to have students using the language more, but felt that because of the amount of the material she must cover in the time she has, she is not as flexible in that. She explained that her on-level classes must get through a certain amount of material in order for them to walk into the next level class prepared with all the information from the previous year. She stated,

Unfortunately we're kind of, um, restricted by the time that we're given. And I suppose I could just take longer and just not care about the curriculum, but for example, for your regular classes you need to have a specific structure and you're not...it's difficult to be flexible with that sense (C1.4)

And,

I wish I was able to do more games and more interactive activities, but unfortunately because we're kind of restricted to the amount of material we are required to cover, it just...I wish that we had more flexibility for that part of it. Because when you make it that interactive, it makes it a lot more meaningful for them. (C1.4)

She again returned to state her belief that when students interact with the vocabulary words and hear and see them in many different contexts, learning occurs for them in a meaningful way. She expressed a need to stick with the conventional memorization activities in order to keep students on the right track and give them a structured

environment.

### DISCUSSION

Though in many ways similar, all three participants come from different teaching backgrounds, schools, training, and experience. In terms of their own experience learning a second language and their beliefs and methods of teaching vocabulary in their classroom, each teacher responded to a different set of students and therefore different challenges. However, through the interviews, it is apparent that the participants share similar sentiments in the following areas related to teaching vocabulary: a belief in immersion and implicit instruction to learn vocabulary and a language, an expression of disparity between the ideal and reality, similar challenges in the classroom, and a belief that there is no most effective way to teach vocabulary.

#### **Belief in immersion and implicit instruction**

As was seen in the research, all three participants agree that vocabulary is the essential foundation of language learning. All participants made remarks on this belief:

To me it's [vocabulary] the most important thing. (A1.2)

If you don't have vocabulary you can't say anything. (B1.2)

Oh my gosh, it's essential. It's essential. I mean grammar is important, but at the very least being able to say basic words, even the basic words you can communicate. (C1.2)

Beyond these shared sentiments, there is a belief that vocabulary is most effectively learned through immersion, or placing the learner in an environment in which their native tongue is not surrounding them. This belief was also expressed in the literature as the most effective method (Jiménez, 2010). Both Participant A and B learned



their second language through immersion, and while both shared feelings of discomfort and little enjoyment, both also recognized the undeniable success of the method in a shorter amount of time. Participant A described this process as a matching of visuals and words in real life:

...the visual aspect of the language...as people were saying things I could actually relate it to it...because they could point to it, ah the facial expressions, ah I could feel it, touch it, all the five senses (A1.2)

Participant A also expressed that he would like to take his students abroad just for three months, and that would be the preferred way. While Participant B learned her second language through formal instruction and a short term of immersion, her beliefs also echo the other two participants, placing value on the immersion experience:

And also the more contact you have with the language and people who speak the language, the more you begin to understand nuance, and the way it's actually used with native speakers. (B1.1)

Beyond immersion, all participants seem to echo philosophies that show implicit instruction. Throughout the literature, it seems that learning vocabulary in context and through multiple exposure is important. Modern day language learning theories urge avoiding direct translation and learning words in isolation (Ostovar-Namaghi, 2013). Participants all seemed to hold this same belief. For example, Participant A felt that vocabulary was ideally learned through repetition and stressed the importance of words that have multiple meanings (A1.2). He stated the importance of linking words together to see relationships between different vocabulary words. Likewise, Participant B believes vocabulary instruction occurs naturally, like it would for children learning their first language (B1.3). She even contended for “avoiding the trap of giving words in Spanish with English definitions and moving on”, which would be an example of explicit

instruction (B1.5). Participant C added her belief that vocabulary development occurs through visuals and a feeling of relevance (C1.2). Throughout all three interviews, all participants generally held beliefs in accordance with implicit instruction and modern language theories.

### **Challenges in the foreign language classroom**

The researcher inquired about the challenges the participants faced as a foreign language teacher and then in vocabulary instruction specifically. While many difficulties arose, the participants all expressed challenges in a few main areas.

The first challenge came from the motivation of students in foreign language classes. For example, foreign language tends to come as a last priority for students who generally place more emphasis on their “core” classes. Participants shared the following on the motivation of their students:

A lot of kids think that it should be easy, and so they don't want to work to learn at what they're doing and there's a lot of complaining. (B1.1)

And,

The culture of kids here...it's the 'I don't need a second language', 'I'm just taking it because I have to'...so getting them to actually sit and learn something and see how it can help them and get how they can actually enjoy it (A1.1)

And,

Motivation for them is definitely...they have different agendas if you will. The regular level tends to be more disconnected to the language, and is more of a chore—an activity that needs to be completed (C1.3)

Generally, participants felt that their students' motivation affected their teaching and the students' learning of the language. When it came to vocabulary instruction, participants felt that students could recognize or recall vocabulary words, but found it most

challenging to reproduce words, especially when spoken. Participant B acknowledged the learning process of moving from recognition to recall to eventually reproduction of the vocabulary. She shared that the best way to speak Spanish is to prohibit English, although stated that this can also bring about silence and can be difficult to maintain in a full classroom of different levels of understanding (B1.5). Participant A also stated,

Ah, so most of them are able to identify the word if I say it or if they see it. Now then saying it and writing it, it just depends on the individual kid's level. And from what I've seen this six weeks it's how much they want to learn the language...there's kids too embarrassed to say it, because if they screw up they're afraid somebody's going to laugh at them. This group doesn't care because they are trying to learn it. (B1.4)

Again, the motivation of the student affects this aspect as well.

The main challenge teachers also face is the amount of time students spend in their classroom and the amount of curriculum that must be covered in that time frame. Students in Participant A and Participant C's classroom spend about 40 minutes in class five days a week. Participant B's students follow a block schedule and spend an hour and 20 minutes in her class every other day. In all, students are only spending between 3 and 5 hours learning the language each week, with little exposure to the language outside of class. All three participants expressed a challenge to teach vocabulary as fully as they would like to in the time they have. Participant C summed it up as,

Unfortunately we're kind of, um, restricted by the time that we're given. And I suppose I could just take longer and just not care about the curriculum, but for example, for your regular classes you need to have a specific structure and you're not...it's difficult to be flexible with that sense. (C1.5)

Because of these challenges, the teachers often opt for more simple activities that involve rote memorization and isolate words from a word list more often. Along with that, they often opt for assessments that test recognition and recall more often than

reproduction of the word in context. Therefore in many ways, the teachers do not always have the resources, such as time, available to them to be able to teach completely through implicit instruction. Instead, explicit instruction must be used often in order to move students along the curriculum and stay aligned with other classes.

### **Ideal v. Reality**

In considering the beliefs of the participants and the challenges encountered, there appears to be disparities between how teachers believe students learn and how they are actually teaching. Thus, all participants expressed a disparity between their ideal and their reality. For example, Participant B expressed a strong belief that students learn language naturally like children, but also felt that this was not possible in the context of a foreign language classroom. She stated,

I try to teach naturally, but also realizing that, you can't...it's not going to be the same—so you make as many connections as you can because connections are what makes meaning. But you have to do a certain amount of the rote practice, because if you don't they won't...in your limited time, they won't get it. And the perk of high school is that they're capable of rote practice, and they're capable of memorizing, but that won't make it stick, so that's not where I stay. (B1.5)

And,

Well you have limited time, so while students, you know, I try to consider how kids learn language actually and teach that way, however, a kid learning their first language is constantly surrounded by the input of that language 24/7. A kid earning a second language in high school is getting 3-5 hours a week plus whatever time they put in on their homework which could range between 20 minutes to 6 hours depending on the kid, you know, that's not the same and so you can't...I try to teach naturally, but also realizing that, you can't...it's not going to be the same (B1.5)

On the other hand, Participant A believes that learning vocabulary is all about repetition and exposing students to the words as much as possible. When asked about the best way to learn vocabulary, he responded,

Ideally, repetition. The problem is most kids don't have the patience to repeat it. Just like you can teach them "Hola", and unless they repeat it, they're never going to learn it. And they feel dorky or uncool if they sit there and repeat after you (A1.2)

Likewise, all participants engaged in a generous amount of self-reflection in examining their beliefs about vocabulary learning and also how difficult it can be to truly teach in that way, following an implicit instruction model.

### **Most effective methods of teaching vocabulary**

Each participant had a large repertoire of teaching methods, examples, and ways to teach vocabulary to their students. Instead of sticking to a specific learning theory or school of thought, every activity fell on a spectrum. Some activities emphasized memorization of translations, while others came by reading, visuals, and within many different contexts. While each teacher had shaped their vocabulary instruction to specifically match their teaching style and classroom, there were several common threads between the participants. For example, both participant A and B attempt to draw personal connections between the words and the students. Their instruction included the following:

We'll find something that's funny about that word to relate it to. You know, something they can remember. Like lately, because again I don't watch these shows. Dora the Explorer. 'I learned that from Dora the Explorer, that's where I saw it.' ... so we link it to something they can relate it to. (A1.3)

And,

I think any time they get to talk about themselves and their own experiences makes it memorable and makes connections and makes it stick more. (B1.3)

Likewise, both Participant A and Participant C stressed the importance of repetition in learning vocabulary. Both included teaching methods that give the students choice in how to practice their vocabulary lists in a sort of drill and repeat approach.

Participant C says her main strategies are just constant exposure to the word in some form to help with memorization. (C1.4). This interaction ultimately helps students become familiar with vocabulary words, their multiple meanings, and how they may act in context and sentence structure.

Above all, all participants agreed that the use of technology was the most enjoyable method for students to learn vocabulary. While all participants reported extensive use of technology, all also reported that they felt most inexperienced and inept in this area. Participant B claimed, “this is an area I’d like to improve” (B1.4) However, common applications such as Quizlet and Conjuguemos are used to help with the recognition of words and quick translation. For example, Participant A reported grades improving after introducing Quizlet to learn vocabulary words. He claimed this happened for two reasons:

Because they were studying at home, and what’s the one thing they have?  
Their cellphone. (A1.5)

And,

And if they’re studying, like one girl told me, it looks like I’m doing something else, but I’m actually studying. So everyone thinks she’s on her cellphone, so, yeah but, if you have your flashcards it looks like you’re a nerd. But if you’re on your cellphone it looks like you’re tweeting or doing something else. The cool aspect of it comes in effect. (A1.5)

In addition, Participant B shared her use of technology to be most useful for practice. She says,

When you’re talking recall, oh you know sometimes I’ll enter words into a Quizlet, and then they play the games and they think that’s super entertaining and that helps them recall, or just to recognize the words or recall them...not necessarily do anything with them, but I think what technology can do is provide you with opportunities to practice. (B1.4)

On the other hand, technology can also be a downfall for vocabulary development

because of the use of translators. Participant B felt that translator hindered vocabulary development because students could look something up and then immediately forget it. While having some downfalls, technology continues to be a preference for students and many teachers when learning new vocabulary.

Participants were also asked their favorite or most effective form of teaching vocabulary. While the teachers seemed to have a variety of strategies, there appeared to be no favorite way to teach and no philosophy exclusively followed. In general, participants reported that teachers must instead employ a large variety of methods to teach in order to reach the different levels in the classroom as well as the different learning styles. Participants responded,

...every form exposes them to the words and the language, so I mean eventually they're going to pick their own learning, their own learning style...so I can't say that...I've not has very ineffective ones. To some level, they are effective. (C1.3)

And,

I think that almost anything is good if it's not the only thing... but mostly as long as you try a variety of things, I think they're all good. (B1.3)

Furthermore, because the participants feel a certain stress to get through a curriculum in a set amount of time, it becomes important to use strategies that save time, although they may not be most effective. Participant B claimed that there has to be a time and place for direct translation, although it is potentially the least effective in terms of getting students to actually use the vocabulary words. She admits,

You have to do a certain amount of the rote practice, because if you don't they won't...in your limited time, they won't get it. And the perk of high school is that they're capable of rote practice, and they're capable of memorizing, but that won't make it stick, so that's not where I stay. (B1.5)

Therefore, no method of learning vocabulary is perfect or will fit all of a teacher's instructional needs. Instead, teachers take vocabulary activities from all different schools of thought and tailor them to their needs in the classroom.

### CONCLUSION

Through the literature it is apparent that the field of foreign language education has been constantly changing as the new methods emerge. While most teachers buy into one philosophy or another, how they transfer their personal beliefs into the classroom can manifest differently. As seen in all three interviews, there is a wide spread belief and push to use more implicit methods to teach language and vocabulary, teaching new words authentically and naturally like one would learn their first language as children. However, foreign language classrooms in the U.S. are a unique blend of challenges and limitations when it comes to time, curriculum, and the motivation of the students for taking the language. Because of this, many teachers must meet these challenges creatively and using a large repertoire of strategies and activities to teach vocabulary. This manifests as a mix of explicit methods, including memorization drills and vocabulary lists, as well as implicit methods of trying to get their students to use words in context and learn its meaning in a more complex manner. Through using available resources such as technology and other resources, they expose students to the words of the target second language. Further, based on the answers of participants, statements and beliefs echoed Brown (2007), who found that no single research method would guarantee universal success. Working within the challenges and circumstances of their classrooms, these foreign language teachers ultimately strive to make meaning of vocabulary for their students as naturally and as enjoyable as they can.



APPENDIX A**Sample Interview Protocol**

1. Thank the teacher for his or her time.
2. Please tell me about your professional background. How many years have you taught? What grade level have you taught? What levels of foreign language have you taught?
3. How much time do students spend in your class each week?
4. Why did you decide to teach foreign languages? What is the best part? The most challenging?
5. What was your personal experience with learning a second language?
6. What role do you think vocabulary plays in learning a second language?
7. How do you believe students learn vocabulary in general? In a foreign language?
8. How do you introduce new words to your class?
9. How do you test that students have learned the meaning of those words?
10. What methods of teaching vocabulary do you find most effective? What methods do the students enjoy most?
11. Have you experienced any methods that were not as effective?
12. How do you incorporate vocabulary into the other aspects of language learning?
13. How do you approach vocabulary development when lesson planning?
14. What strategies do you use to help students make meaning of vocabulary? Do you utilize technology in any way?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your teaching of vocabulary?

APPENDIX B

**Participant C's Tic-Tac-Toe Vocabulary Activity**

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**Extra practice homework TIC-TAC-TOE choice for Vocabulary Study**

**Instrucciones:** Choose **three** of these options to study the Spanish topics you learned. They must be connected to form tic-tac-toe. **Due test date.** Turn in completed activities and this sheet to receive 10 extra credit points. Activity can only be done once per chapter.

**Your goal is to know:**

- What words and phrases mean in Spanish
- How words and phrases are spelled in Spanish.

Make <b>flash cards</b> for all words from the end of the chapter list. Label each word in Spanish on one side and in English on the other.	Write all words from the end of the chapter list <b>three times</b> in Spanish and define it three times in English.	Write all on words from the end of the chapter list in Spanish using three <b>different colors</b> . Each word will be written three times. Next to it, write the word in English or draw a picture, symbol or image.
Write 10 sentences using 20 vocabulary words from the chapter in Spanish. Translate sentence into English.	Write all words from the end of the chapter list in accordion style. Fold your paper along the long side four times to form an accordion. Write your list of words on the first column in Spanish then on the second column in English. Repeat.	Create your own <b>word search</b> connecting all the words from the chapter.
In your notebook, vocabulary section, rewrite your vocabulary and draw a picture/symbol/image to show what it means.	<b>Classify</b> all the words in specific categories (parts of speech, <b>different than on your list</b> ) and explain your thinking in writing (in English).	Use 20 of the words to write an <b>illustrated story, poem, dialogue or comic strip</b> in Spanish using complete sentences. <u>Underline words used.</u>

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