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Acquisition and Solidification of Grammar and Vocabulary in Elementary French Classrooms through Skit Performance

Jill Owen

Western Kentucky University

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ACQUISITION AND SOLIDIFICATION OF GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY IN ELEMENTARY
FRENCH CLASSROOMS THROUGH SKIT PERFORMANCE

By

JILL OWEN

2010

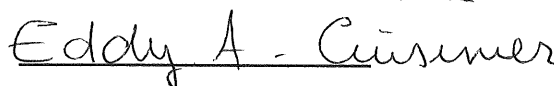
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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of


University Honors College at

Western Kentucky University

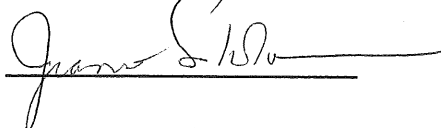
Approved by:



Eddy Cuisinier



Karin Egloff



Jeanne Sokolowski

ABSTRACT

In this study, groups of elementary French students in two classes at Western Kentucky University utilized two different methods of skit performance to demonstrate the importance of communicative activities in the foreign language classroom. The effectiveness of each method was assessed to determine which method helped the students acquire grammar and vocabulary concepts more readily. One method was to have students write their own skits using a chapter in their textbook. The other method was to give students an outline that they filled in and memorized. Surveys and quizzes were used to gather data. The results of which method proved to be more helpful to students are based on students' opinions, submitted through surveys, and quiz scores. Due to the ambiguous nature of the results, a third method is also proposed as a combination of the two to aid students further in acquiring grammar and vocabulary in the target language.

INDEX WORDS: Communicative Competence, Second Language Acquisition, Skit Activities

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2010

ACQUISITION AND SOLIDIFICATION OF GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY CONCEPTS IN
ELEMENTARY FRENCH CLASSROOMS THROUGH SKIT PERFORMANCE

By

JILL OWEN

Committee Chair: Eddy Cuisinier

Committee: Karin Egloff

Jeanne Sokolowski

Electronic Version Approved:

Honors College

Western Kentucky University

March 2010

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to everyone who has helped me further my French education along the way: my parents, Ken and Cindy Owen, who have provided perpetual support to me and all my endeavors; my high school French teacher, Terry Johnson, who never stopped teaching and encouraging me; and the amazing French faculty at WKU – M. Eddy Cuisinier, Dr. Karin Egloff, and Dr. Nathan Love – without whom I would not be where I am today in my French education.

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I. Introduction

When it comes to the foreign language (FL) classroom, researchers are continually in search of the best teaching methods. This is to ensure students acquire a second language and learn to communicate in that language in the most efficient and effective ways possible. In recent years, a greater emphasis has been put on combining the four main components of FL education (grammar, listening, speaking, and writing) into a fifth – communication. Making headway on that front, The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has defined five “C’s” (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) in their most recent effort to establish FL classroom standards – The Standards for Foreign Language Learning. These standards came about because educators are realizing the need for re-defined expectations for foreign language students. Not only should they be able to understand the mechanics of a foreign language (grammar and vocabulary), they should be taught the ability to employ those mechanics through communication. As discussed by Sandra Savignon (2001), the control students possess over communication, at any level of language learning, has been termed *communicative competence*. This method of striving for communicative competence in the classroom can also help students learn from one another as they communicate in the target language. This project is an effort to contribute to the research of best teaching and learning methods by identifying ways students learn and apply their foreign language skills through a form of guided planning in skit performance.

After having participated in and observed many university French classroom activities, I came to the conclusion that communicative competence seems somewhat

difficult to attain at the elementary level of language learning because students have not yet encountered all major grammar concepts and their vocabulary is limited. However, if students are taught how to use the concepts with which they have been presented immediately upon being exposed to them, mistakes can be corrected and the overall goal of efficient and effective communication can be achieved. Thus was born the idea of guided planning to aid elementary French students in more effective communication.

The initial hypothesis was that students who filled in an outlined skit, memorized it, and performed it in front of the class would perform better on a quiz given after the assignment than the students who were asked to write their own skits. This is because the guided students would recall the grammar and vocabulary concepts more easily due to the fact that they were able to see them used properly. These elementary students would also feel more comfortable with an outline because it would give them a starting point – they would not be expected to write a skit all on their own with no guidance – thus building their confidence and language competence. The basis for this hypothesis lies in the fact that pre-task planning and guided planning have been shown to enhance student learning and second language acquisition in the classroom (Mochizuki & Ortega 2008; Tavakoli & Foster 2008). Basically, the more assistance elementary French students can be given at the start of the task, the better they will prove to communicate at the end. This hypothesis also stems from this experimenter's own experiences within the foreign language classroom and noticing the need for more guidance concerning communicative classroom activities.

This thesis will explore the benefits and drawbacks behind each of the methods of skit performance, focus on student feedback as the main indicator of which method proved

to be the most effective, and explain how these findings relate to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) as a whole. I will also identify certain challenges faced in carrying out the project due to numerous independent variables and their effects on student performance. Finally, my own experiences and observations in the classroom as both student and researcher will offer a unique window through which to view this project.

II. Research

This study is concerned with communication and proficiency in elementary language classrooms. There is ample research to support the use of communicative activities as a means of improving and promoting more classroom discussion in the target language (Savignon 1987; 2003). Attaining communicative competence involves teacher implementation of communicative activities within the FL classroom so that students can learn by doing. Earlier research (Doukanari 1995) has established that role-playing activities allow students to enhance their communication through trial and error situations in a non-threatening, student-led classroom environment. Among all other methods of teaching – grammar drills, writing assignments, computerized language activities – facilitating classroom discussion and interaction with the teachers and students seem to be the most effective ways to learn and acquire a language.

This study then attempts to determine which kinds of communicative activities – guided or unguided – prove to be the most effective. First it is important to analyze the differences between having students write their own skits and filling out a pre-written outline. It is logical that having students write their own skits would challenge them to be independent and take more risks in employing the target language. The students, it seemed, would rise to the challenge and create skits that used the grammar and vocabulary as correctly as possible while still maintaining a coherent meaning and structure. In her study of flow theory in the foreign language classroom, Joy Egbert (2003) concluded that students learn at their highest potential and interest level (obtaining “flow”) when they are appropriately challenged based on their skill level. Therefore, these beginning French

students, based on Egbert's conclusions, would be more likely to rise to the challenge of writing their own skit if they were graded or given feedback appropriately based on their level of learning. Thus, they would out-perform the students with pre-outlined skits in which the material could be just out of reach for these students due to the differing language levels in the elementary classroom. The students might also recall the grammar and vocabulary to a greater extent than the students who memorized a pre-outlined skit because they were required to use the concepts themselves, if not always correctly.

In contrast, providing the skit correctly outlined could help these beginning language students understand the ways in which sentences can be put together in context, which is a challenge many of the students admitted facing. In their article, Naoko Mochizuki and Lourdes Ortega explore the importance of "pre-task planning" and "guided planning" for language learners at the high school level to increase their fluency. Their research shows that "guided planning can succeed in creating favorable conditions for striking a pedagogical balance between communication and grammar" (Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008, p. 11). Hall (1999) also argues for more teacher facilitation in such communicative activities. She found that teachers can aid or impede student success in learning based on the way they phrase their questions. Grammar drills do not always encourage student communication in the classroom, but facilitating discussion between students and inviting them to give more information than necessary can boost students' confidence levels in trying out new grammar and vocabulary concepts. In essence, guided planning activities are optimal for language acquisition. This is because students can work together and the teacher is able to correct, guide, and ask appropriate questions to draw more from the students.

Also in accordance with the theory of guided planning, Savignon (1987) proposes a five-component plan for teachers to make their classrooms interactive and communication-oriented. She names one of the components “theatre arts” (238) and emphasizes the need for planning role-playing activities in the classroom. Teachers, she states, “need first to set up the situation. They cannot just ask the learners to stand up and act. Teachers must prepare learners with the tools they need to act” (240). By doing this, teachers allow students to ask questions about what they are learning and how to apply it directly to the situation they are performing. Scripted role playing is one of many ways teachers can help students be more communicatively competent.

Though recognizing that role playing is one of the most effective methods of engaging students and helping them learn, foreign language educators know that the application is much more elusive. There are many uncontrollable variables within the classroom setting that one must take into account when analyzing students’ performance and how they react to certain activities. Such challenges are found in nearly every foreign language classroom, which is demonstrated very clearly in many case studies involving SLA in the classroom (Bacon 1990; Horwitz 1988; Li 1998). Student motivation, beliefs about language learning, and a discrepancy between students’ views and teachers’ views of language learning are just a few of the variables encountered here. Because communicative language teaching (CLT) is “learner-centered and experience-based,” (Richards & Rogers qtd. in Li 679) and learners’ views can be so different from their teacher’s when it comes to learning a second language, it is important to take into account students’ beliefs and opinions, especially regarding communicative activities.

In support of the importance of students' beliefs, Elaine Horwitz (1988) conducted a survey in which students were asked several questions to determine how they felt about learning a foreign language. The questions ranged from those about difficulty of language learning to inquiries into students' motivations and expectations. By categorizing the students' responses to the questionnaire, Horwitz concluded that students' preconceived notions about language learning can be detrimental to how much they actually learn. If teachers can help alleviate some of students' fears or concerns when it comes to learning a foreign language, students might be more motivated to learn. Rueda and Chen (2005) observed in their study the unique motivation for students of a particular ethnic background to succeed at learning a second language, which could aid in further research to discover the best teaching methods. In spite of the various ways in which teachers conduct their classes, some students still seem to have trouble learning the target language. In a study performed by Krug et al. (2002) students were given a paired-association assessment of vocabulary in learning foreign language. Krug and his team concluded that some students simply have a hard time learning the paired-associations quickly enough because they cannot seem to learn vocabulary words without directly translating them. This means they have trouble making the connection between a set of words in the target language to those in the native language. Thus some students do not learn as quickly as other students, making them struggle with certain communicative activities.

Another issue teachers may encounter with interactive activities is not anticipating all possible results of such activities. In accordance with this issue, Savignon (1987) notes:

A class cannot just 'play a game.' Nor should simulations, role playing, and other opportunities for interaction be saved for parties, rainy days, or the last few minutes of the class period. To be effective, communicative activities must constitute an integral part of the classroom program. (240)

If not enough time is devoted to the activity, it can seem like “just a game” and students can make too much noise, be confused about instructions, or be bored by an activity that seems like a waste of time (Savignon 1987). Thus, teachers must take their communicative activities seriously by devoting whole class periods to the proficiency of the language involved in the role-playing activity or other task. In conjunction with this, Mondada and Doehler (2004) argue that communicative tasks are largely shaped by student input and interpretation of original instructions. Many teachers see these classroom “games” as disruptive to the flow of their classrooms and feel much time is wasted regarding task instructions. However, this pre-activity interaction, while aiding the students in understanding exactly what they are supposed to do during the activity, can also give rise to innovative ideas within the classroom not previously thought about by teachers. If it is true that “interaction is the most basic site of experience, and hence functions as the most basic site of organized activity where learning can take place,” (Mondada & Doehler 2004: 502) then perhaps teachers should not worry so much about changing their activities or making students abide by certain standards if learning is indeed taking place.

Despite the challenges mentioned above, learning did take place in this study as the students themselves verify through their survey feedback and quiz scores. But first, we will take a closer look at the logistics of this particular study to gauge which method proved to be more effective in helping the students learn and overcome some of these challenges.

III. Study Design/Methodology

In this project, two elementary-level French classes (FREN 102) at Western Kentucky University were assigned two different skit activities over the course of one semester. The students were divided into groups at random and each group was asked to either write their own skit using a set of vocabulary and grammar from a specific chapter in their textbook or fill in the blanks of a pre-written skit from a word bank containing the same grammar and vocabulary concepts from the same textbook chapter. The majority of the project took place in class; the students, though, were asked to prepare their skits, whether from an outline or written entirely on their own, outside of class. After explaining the skit assignment to the students on their first day of class, the students were first given a pre-skit survey (see Appendix A) to aid in understanding the background of the students and how they felt about the proposed skit activity.

In the class of 19 that met at 8:00AM every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, there was an even mix of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Roughly half of this class studied French in high school, while the other half of the class took French 101 at this university in a previous semester. In the class of 28 that met at 11:30AM every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the demographics were slightly different. There were a larger percentage of juniors and seniors than freshmen and sophomores, but exactly half of them had taken French in high school while the other half took French 101 previously in college.

Once the students took this survey, they were randomly placed into groups of two, three, or four, based on the available numbers in the classroom. Half of the groups (3 or 4 different groups in each class) were given a pre-prepared skit suited to their language level

(see Appendix B). The skit contained blank spaces which students filled in by choosing the appropriate word or phrase from a given “word bank” of vocabulary and grammar. They then memorized the skit they filled in. The other groups wrote and memorized their own skits using the same set of vocabulary and grammar. The students were then asked to perform their skits in front of the class. A second set of anonymous surveys was given after the skit performances that assessed students’ feelings toward the skit activity as a whole as well as the methods each group used in memorizing or writing their skits. A written assessment was then given over the grammar and vocabulary concepts to test students’ acquired knowledge through the activity. The quiz was set up so students had to write sentences or fill in blanks based on the vocabulary and grammar for each chapter. For consistency’s sake, the aforementioned steps were repeated later in the semester and the two halves swapped learning methods utilizing a different set of vocabulary and grammar. The groups that wrote their own skits were given a skit to fill in and memorize and those who memorized a pre-outlined skit were asked to write their own. The overall goal of the skit activity was to gauge which method would allow students to learn grammar and vocabulary most effectively. Their language acquisition was measured by analyzing their skit performances, quiz scores, and post-activity surveys. Copious notes were taken over the students’ performances and a numerical value scale from one to four (one being the lowest score) was assigned to different aspects of students’ skits to determine how well they employed and applied the grammar and vocabulary given to them. These aspects of the performance were taken from the professor’s previously-existing oral presentation evaluation rubric. The presentations were analyzed based on pronunciation, volume, use of

French, and preparedness. A copy of this rubric can be found in Appendix D. The quizzes, then, provided a more empirical way to gauge how much information students were learning throughout this process and were thus a good indication of how communicatively competent they had the potential to be based on the amount of grammar and vocabulary they learned and retained.

IV. Results

Based on the pre-skit survey results for the 8:00AM class, nine of 19 students reported that their favorite thing to learn in class was French culture and six favored vocabulary while 13 stated that grammar was the most difficult thing to learn and the other six were spread out across vocabulary, culture, listening, and reading. Hoping to understand the students' reasons for taking this class and consequently how much effort they might put into learning their skit, students were asked if they enrolled to fulfill university requirements, because French is interesting, or both. The majority of the class (15 of the 19 students) reported both with one student finding the class interesting and three enrolling to fulfill university requirements. After explaining the project to the students, they were asked which method of skit performance they would prefer and why. The results were almost equally divided. Eight of the 19 students stated they would rather fill in a pre-written outline while the other 11 stated they would prefer to write their own. Arguments for filling in an outline included such statements as, *"I like vocab. but I am not very good at it. Well, enough to write a skit,"* *"Because my French knowledge isn't that well and I don't know if I could write a complete/correct skit,"* and, *"With the alternative, we wouldn't know if we did it right."* On the other hand, students made good points about writing their own skits. Their comments included: *"If you write it yourself, you are forced to understand all of it, rather than just memorizing someone else's work,"* *"It would help me to write entire sentences and ideas rather than just fill in one word or phrase,"* and, *"If I wrote it I would be challenged to think critically about word choice/grammar."*

In the 11:30AM class, 15 of the 28 students reported they like learning about French culture most while 10 students preferred vocabulary. One student preferred working on pronunciation and two students reported they did not like learning French at all.

Unfortunately, due to the format of the survey, students were not given the opportunity to tell us why they did not like to learn French, or why a specific area interested them more than the others. An overwhelming 23 students of the 28 stated that grammar was the most difficult thing about learning French with three students reporting vocabulary was the hardest and for one student it was pronunciation. 13 of these students said they were only taking this course to fulfill university requirements, three said it was just interesting to learn, 11 claimed both for taking this class, and one student said he was learning French to be able to speak it in Africa. When this set of students were asked which method of skit performance they would prefer, 18 of them voted for the pre-outlined skit. When asked why, they gave such comments as, *"Filling in something pre-outlined would ensure, by the one creating the skit, that the participants are gaining a more well-rounded understanding of the particular topic at hand,"* *"A pre-outlined would give me more confidence in feeling that I did it correctly,"* and, *"Because I'm not advanced enough to make one up on my own; I could see how to set one up."* The ten students that stated they would prefer to write their own skit reasoned, *"It forces me to figure out grammar and vocab. on my own, not by rote memorization,"* *"Because then it is on me to use the vocab. and grammar I am comfortable with and can steer the skit better and with more confidence,"* and, *"Because when I am forced to write it myself, I have to think about what I'm writing and what it means, rather than just memorizing lines."*

Based on the oral presentation evaluation rubric (see Appendix D), students' pronunciation and preparedness levels remained about the same for all groups between each round of skit performances (see Tables 1 & 2). Increases or decreases in scores on pronunciation were attributed to the fact that typically students showed better pronunciation of words in the skits they had written than those in the skits they memorized. Of the total 15 groups in each class, 9 of them scored a one or two on the pronunciation portion of the rubric for both rounds and all but three groups either remained at the same level or fell by a point in their perceived preparedness to perform their skits. However, the students did show improvement in their use of French and their volume levels in speaking. Of the 15 total groups in each class, about half of them improved by one point or more in their use of French in the skit, meaning they either did not make a mistake in French and fix it in English or they did not replace French words they did not know how to pronounce for their English equivalents. Nine of the 15 groups also improved the volume of their skits, from the first round to the second round of performances, by one point (a three to a four on the rubric). This indicates that the students felt more confident in performing their skits and could therefore project their voices to be heard more clearly. This improvement was also reflected in the students' quiz scores.

	Pronunciation		Volume	
8:00AM Class	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2
Group 1	2	2	3	4
Group 2*	1	3	3	4
Group 3*	3	3	4	4
Group 4	3	1	4	4
Group 5*	2	3	3	4
Group 6	1	1	3	4
	Use of French		Preparedness	
8:00AM Class	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2
Group 1	3	4	2	2
Group 2*	3	4	2	3
Group 3*	4	4	3	3
Group 4	3	4	4	2
Group 5*	3	4	2	3
Group 6	3	4	2	2

*Table 1 (*indicates groups who filled in an outline for Round 1 and wrote their own skits for Round 2)*

	Pronunciation		Volume	
11:30AM Class	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2
Group 1*	2	2	4	4
Group 2*	2	2	3	4
Group 3	3	2	4	4
Group 4	2	1	3	4
Group 5	2	2	3	4
Group 6	2	2	4	4
Group 7*	1	3	3	4
Group 8	1	1	3	4
Group 9*	1	1	4	4
	Use of French		Preparedness	
11:30AM Class	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2
Group 1*	3	3	3	3
Group 2*	3	4	3	3
Group 3	4	3	4	3
Group 4	3	3	2	2
Group 5	4	4	4	3
Group 6	3	3	3	3
Group 7*	3	3	3	3
Group 8	2	3	1	2
Group 9*	3	3	2	2

Table 2 (indicates groups who filled in an outline for Round 1 and wrote their own skits for Round 2)*

For the 8:00AM class, students who filled in and memorized pre-written outlines performed better on the quiz than the students who wrote their own skits. The average score for the students who used outlines was 6 correct responses out of a possible 12 while the students who wrote their own averaged only about 4 out of 12. For the 11:30AM class, the quiz results were very similar. The students who wrote their own skits averaged 4.75 out of 12 while the students who memorized an outline averaged 5.9 correct responses out of 12 (see Table 3).

Round 1 – Quiz 1 [12 questions; 3 parts]	Averages	# of correct responses/total questions
8:00AM Class (15 students)	Pre-written	6.07/12 = 50.58%
	Self-written	4.31/12 = 35.92%
	Class	5.19/12 = 43.25%
11:30AM Class (23 students)	Pre-written	5.91/12 = 49.25%
	Self-written	4.75/12 = 39.58%
	Class	5.33/12 = 44.42%

Table 3

Although there was a difference in student performance on the aforementioned quiz, student responses on the post-skit survey were fairly consistent for both groups in the 8:00AM class. Eight of the 15 students in this class wrote their own skit and seven of them admitted to using online translators or other resources to help them complete the assignment. Of the seven students who filled in an outline, only four of them used online translators or other resources to complete their assignment. The majority of both groups (six students in each group) stated they felt that the skit activity made the grammar and vocabulary concepts easier to understand. The students who wrote their own cited such reasons as they had to learn to memorize/write the skit, it made the concepts more applicable, and they learned more by doing it themselves. The students who filled in an outline stated they could see the concepts in context, they knew the content of the skit was correct, and it was helpful to see the concepts in a real-life situation.

For the 11:30AM class, 12 of the 23 students wrote their own skit. Nine of them admitted to using an online translator or other resource to write their skit. Of the 11 students who memorized an outline, only five of them stated they used another resource to fill in their skits. Six of the students who wrote their own skits felt the activity made the

grammar and vocabulary easier to understand, while only four of the students who filled in an outline felt this way. The seven students in this group who did not feel filling in an outline was effective stated they simply had to memorize, not necessarily understand the concepts to perform them.

Later in the semester the groups switched skit performance methods and were given another round of skits and post-skit surveys. The overall quiz averages improved by nearly 20% for the 8:00AM class and by almost 10% for the 11:30AM class (see Table 4). Though the quiz scores overall seem low, it is important to note that students were told not to worry about their performances on the quizzes. This activity had to use some measure to gauge proficiency in the target grammar and vocabulary concepts, but quizzes, surveys, and the like remained anonymous so students would not feel pressured into doing well. This could also have contributed to the low scores. Even so, keeping the quizzes anonymous and taking the pressure off gave a much more accurate measure of how the skit activity alone affected students' knowledge of the presented concepts rather than having them study outside of class to perform well on the quizzes.

Round 2 – Quiz 2 [10 questions; 2 parts]	Averages	# of correct responses/total questions
8:00AM Class (13 students)	Pre-written	6/10 = 60%
	Self-Written	6.75/10 = 67.5%
	Class	6.38/10 = 63.8%
11:30AM Class (27 students)	Pre-written	5.4/10 = 54%
	Self-Written	4.83/10 = 48.3%
	Class	5.12/10 = 51.2%

Table 4

After this second round of skit performances, students had much more insight into the effectiveness of the activity overall. They gave exceedingly valid feedback comparing the two methods and which they thought was most effective. For the 8:00AM class, six of the seven students who wrote their own skit felt this method helped them learn grammar and vocabulary while only four of the seven students who filled in an outline felt that method was effective. In the 11:30AM class, the results were very similar. Eight of the 12 students who wrote their own skit felt that method made the grammar and vocabulary easier to understand, while only six of the 15 students who filled in an outline felt this way. Thus, although the quiz scores were generally better for students who filled in a pre-outlined skit, the students themselves felt that writing their own skits made the grammar and vocabulary concepts easier to understand than when they filled in an outline.

Students' confidence levels were also measured as a means to gauge which method was more effective for students. In observing the students perform their skits, they felt more confident during the second round of skit performances overall. However, their confidence levels did not seem to be affected by the individual method of skit performance. According to the surveys, the majority of students recorded feeling either "confident" or "somewhat confident" during each of their skit performances, while a handful recorded feeling "not at all confident" during both skit performances. The issue, then, does not lie in the method of skit performance used, but with the whole idea of performing a skit at all. When given a chance to leave comments on the survey, after both rounds of skit performances, students from both classes who did not feel confident in performing either skit method had this to say: *"I do not enjoy getting in front of class especially when I'm*

speaking in another language,” “I guess I enjoyed the skit. The assignment wasn’t bad. I just didn’t like being in skits, so I was uncomfortable,” and, “It was okay; helpful in learning to see examples of how to effectively use the grammar we’re learning, but getting up in front of people and performing something in a non-native language is pretty stressful.”

Confidence levels of the students did seem to affect their performances based on classroom observation. The students who felt more confident were more likely to have their skits memorized and act out their lines a bit more, whereas the less confident students often stumbled over their presentations, read their lines from a card or paper, and seemed unsure of what they were saying. This is not to say that the less confident students were any less prepared than the confident ones, rather perhaps the less confident students were just as prepared, but not as comfortable because of their performance anxiety.

V. Interpretation of Data/Conclusion

Based on the above data, it is clear that the method of skit performance slightly affected students' quiz scores. Generally, the students who filled in a pre-outlined skit performed better on their quizzes than the students who wrote their own (see Tables 1 and 2 above). Though the quiz scores were slightly low in general, there was a definite difference between each performance for both classes on each occasion they participated in the skit activity. This shows that the outline did make a difference in how prepared they were to answer questions based on the concepts they learned through the skit activity. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported in that the students who were guided through their skit by means of an outline were more likely to remember the concepts utilized. The results from the analyses of the skit performances based on the evaluation rubric were not affected by the method of skit performance as pronunciation and preparedness was an issue for all groups, regardless of performance method. The same is true for measuring the use of French and volume of the skits. Both methods of skit performance showed consistency in students' improvement in their use of French and the volume of their speech from round one to round two.

Even though the empirical data from the quizzes supports the initial hypothesis, students' opinions deviated from my theory, as did the performance analyses, and disproved the hypothesis. Pronunciation, as indicated above, seemed to be a problem for all students and the students who filled in an outline simply seemed to read their skits in front of the class – few made the effort to memorize them. Overall, students who wrote their own skits seemed better prepared, more practiced, and more comfortable with their skits.

While they were not always grammatically correct or easy to understand, the students seemed to know what they were saying more so than the students who filled in an outline. The majority of students with an outline simply read their skits aloud in front of the class, and did not always comprehend what they were reading.

The students' comments on the post-skit surveys taken after they had completed each round of skits also attest to this. Based on what students had to say, it seemed that while both methods had their positive and negative points, neither seemed incredibly effective in helping students learn grammar and vocabulary. Although several students stated they enjoyed the activity overall, they also felt filling in a pre-outlined skit was not as effective in helping them learn the grammar and vocabulary concepts as writing their own skits. Their higher quiz averages, then, could be attributed to the fact that the format of the quizzes was directly related to the format of the skit outlines (see Appendices). Class size could have also affected student performance. The 8:00AM class with only 18 students might have felt more confident and more motivated to do their best for fear of being singled out than those in the 11:30AM class with 30 students. At the same time, a larger class size could have intimidated the students who do not like to perform in front of others. It is also easier to keep track of what students understand and what they are having trouble with in a smaller class, which could mean more specified instruction to the 8:00AM class thus helping them perform at a higher level.

Another observation made throughout this process was that, for these students, pronunciation was a problem across the board. The students who wrote their own skits stated in their post-skit surveys that it was difficult to learn the grammar and vocabulary

when no one could pronounce the words correctly while practicing and performing the skit. At the same time, the students who filled in a pre-outlined skit felt they were simply reading and not comprehending the grammar and vocabulary. This issue is just one of several which need to be addressed within the foreign language classroom if students are to learn at their optimal level. Based on my observations of classroom activities, students were not corrected when their pronunciation of new vocabulary was amiss. When the students read their skits aloud, they did not understand how to pronounce the words because they had not been worked with directly on pronunciation. While communicative classroom environments are important, sometimes basic pronunciation drills are helpful to the students because they are able to hear the difference between how the teacher pronounces vocabulary words and grammar phrases and how they see them written and pronounce them themselves. Directing students to online resources that aid in pronunciation could also be a good way to target the students who are more self-motivated in learning the language.

Other issues observed with this activity include: problems with paired-association as a means of translation (Krug et al. 2002), meaning students attempted to directly translate each word as they wrote their skits from English to French; students' lack of time to meet outside of class to work on the skit, which affected their perceived preparedness; and making such a huge assignment minor in comparison with other classroom activities. It seemed as if the skit activities were not given enough attention based on the results of the students' performances and quiz scores. To remedy this, devoting class time to asking questions regarding the activity and being actively corrected in their errors might help

students feel more confident in their performances. University students as a whole also have difficulty finding time to meet with peers outside the classroom. Thus, in-class practice time would be a great way to enhance the effectiveness of the activity no matter which method of skit performance is used. Pronunciation as well as grammar and vocabulary errors could be corrected the moment they are made and student interaction could be better monitored to ensure students are getting what they need out of the activity.

It is understood, however, that class time is often very limited. Perhaps, then, for an activity of this nature, the teacher could schedule times to meet with each group outside of class to answer any questions they might have or go over certain pronunciations. While teachers' time is also scarce, there really seems to be no other way for students to become communicatively competent without devoting more time to studying under the watchful eye of a knowledgeable instructor. Some students in this study reported feeling that the activities were a waste of time because they did not learn much or devoted too much time to their skit in lieu of working out of the textbook or from worksheets. If the students had been encouraged to work on their skits and ask questions in class, they may not have felt like the activity was "just a game" and their communicative competence might have improved more noticeably. From a student's point of view, it is far easier to ask a question and receive a direct response from a teacher than it is to try and look up exactly what you want on the Internet or in a textbook. The teacher knows the students' backgrounds and experiences with the language and will be able to aid the student far better than any online resource. It is true that many of the students who participated in this study will not go on to further their language education. As previously mentioned, the majority of both classes

admitted to taking this class to complete general requirements only, not simply because they enjoy the language. Therefore, the teacher will often care more about accomplishing communicative competence than the student, which can cause a discrepancy. If the goal of the teacher is communicative competence, but the goal of the student is passing a required class, there must be a way to merge the two so both parties obtain what they are after.

Aside from these complications and whether or not the activity was effective, many students said they enjoyed the activity overall. The students who wrote their own skits felt they benefited from the experience because they were putting what they learned into practice, and the students who filled in an outline felt it was helpful to see the concepts in a correct, real-life context. This confirms that communicative activities do aid students in their understanding of formal grammar and vocabulary.

Due to the somewhat ambiguous results of this study, it is evident that there is a need for further research in this area dealing with a balance between the two methods of skit performance. Other research shows that improvised communicative activities seem to be the most effective (Firth & Wagner 1997; Savignon 1987 & 2003; Chavez 2006; Mondada & Doehler 2004) although some guided planning is necessary to ensure correctness, especially in classroom skit performances like these (Mochizuki & Ortega 2008). Also, with beginning French students, like the ones in this study, improvisation of a lengthy conversation or skit is not a skill they have yet been able to develop due to their elementary level of communicative proficiency. In upper level classes, acting out ordering at a restaurant or a conversation about a film is something students might be asked to do based on their expected level of communicative competence by this point in their French

education. However, in these elementary classes, it is clear they need additional guidance with applying grammar and vocabulary concepts correctly to say what they mean due to their limited knowledge and experience in demonstrating linguistic competency. As direct demonstration of this conclusion, based on students' survey comments, it is clear that they felt more confident memorizing a pre-outlined skit but felt writing their own helped them learn more. Survey comments included such statements as: *"I think writing your own is a more effective method as long as someone is there to help edit before you perform"*; *"I believe that both ways were effective. Writing my own skit put the gram[mar] and vocab[ulary] into situations that I could remember it and memorizing helped me learn it correctly"*; and *"It was okay; helpful in learning to see examples of how to effectively use the grammar we're learning."* Therefore, I propose a sort of compromise between filling in a pre-written outline and writing a skit from the beginning with no guidance. This compromise would include a rough outline, in English, that detailed only what students are required to include in the skit based on grammar and vocabulary in the chapter they are studying. The outline would look something like this:

Skit Activity Outline – Chapter 11 : « Si on allait au cinéma? »

- *Greet one another.*
- *Ask about plans for the weekend.*
- *Discuss the movies showing at the cinema.*
- *Decide on a movie to see (be sure to include why you want to see this film).*
- *Decide on a day and time to meet.*
- *Say goodbye, including the phrase « Je vous retrouve... »*

Giving the students an outline like this ensures they would be held accountable for knowing the French necessary to write this skit. The directions are in English, thus, there is no room for misunderstanding what they should say (as in the pre-outlined skits in French). Because everyone in the class would receive the same outline, the skits would be similar for the whole class. But repetition through skit performance would be an effective method of drilling the concepts without drills themselves. The groups performing the skits would also be held accountable to write an accurate skit by the rest of the class, who already knows what the skit is supposed to look/sound like. Also, with specific instructions for the skit, the teacher could go over pronunciation for just a few key phrases needed to write the skits rather than answering sporadic questions about phrases students have come up with on their own.

Based on the students' feelings toward the two methods of skit performance employed in this study, this compromise seems as though it would be effective. The students felt like they needed some guidance to be confident, but also acknowledged that digging for the information on their own was a more effective way to learn the vocabulary and grammar concepts.

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VI. Appendices

Appendix A

Surveys:

Pre-Skit Survey

FR102 Time Slot: MWF _____ Year in School (freshman, sophomore, etc): _____

1. Did you take French in high school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. If yes, when (precise year)? _____ and for how many years? _____ Years

3. How much French have you taken in college?
 - a. This is my first French course in college
 - b. I took French 101 in college as well

4. If you took French 101 in college, was it at this university?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No (if not here, please tell us where: _____)

5. If yes, how long ago did you take French 101?
 - a. Fall 2008
 - b. Spring 2008
 - c. Fall 2007
 - d. Spring 2007
 - e. Other: _____

6. What is your favorite thing about learning French?
 - a. Grammar
 - b. Vocabulary
 - c. Culture
 - d. I do not like learning French
 - e. Other (please specify): _____

7. In what area do you have the most difficulty?
 - a. Grammar
 - b. Vocabulary
 - c. Culture
 - e. Other (please specify): _____

8. Why are you taking this course? (circle one)
 - a. To fulfill my Gen-Ed requirements
 - b. Because I find French interesting and want to learn more
 - c. Both a. and b.

d. Other (please specify): _____

9. Which method of learning a skit do you think would enhance your grammar and vocabulary knowledge more?

- a. Filling in a pre-outlined skit and then memorizing it
- b. Writing a skit with a given topic, but no outline, and then memorizing it

10. Explain one reason why: _____

Post-Skit Survey

FR102 Time Slot: MWF _____ Year in School (freshman, sophomore, etc): _____

1. Which method of skit performance was your group assigned?

- a. My group wrote our own skit
- b. My group filled in a pre-outlined skit

2. To complete this assignment, did you use an online translator or other resource (other than the textbook)?

- a. Yes (specify which site/resource): _____
- b. No

3. If you filled in a pre-outlined skit, briefly describe what happened in your skit.

4. How did you prepare to perform your skit?

- a. I worked with my group members to memorize our skit
- b. Each of the members memorized the skit on their own time
- c. Other (please specify): _____

5. Do you feel as though this skit activity made the grammar and vocabulary concepts in your skit easier to understand?

- a. Yes. Why?

- b. No

6. What grade do you expect to receive on the activity? _____

7. Do you feel that the grade will accurately reflect your knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary in the chapter and the time you put into learning your skit?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8. If you answered no, please tell why you feel this way:

9. Did you feel confident when performing your skit in front of the class?

- a. Yes
- b. Somewhat
- c. No

10. Please record any other comments or concerns you have about the skit activity (feel free to use the back of this sheet). Did you enjoy the activity? Was it effective? How did it affect you?

Appendix B

Pre-Outlined Skit Examples:

Chapitre 8 : « En train ou en avion ? » – Sketch 5

Two friends want to visit Paris to watch the Tour de France. So, they visit a travel agent to organize their trip.

Première Partie

1 : Ah, bonjour mon ami. Quoi de neuf ?

2 : Eh, rien. J'ai une question. Qu'est-ce que tu vas faire cet été ? Je

_____ décider.

1 : J'ai déjà décidé. Je vais passer l'été en France pour regarder le Tour de France.

2 : Vraiment ? _____ vas-tu y voyager ?

1 : Je viens d'acheter un billet d'avion. Je _____ partir le 2 juillet.

2 : _____ le Tour de France commence-t-il ?

1 : Cette année, le tour commence le dimanche 4 juillet. _____ tu veux, tu peux venir avec moi.

2 : Quelle bonne idée ! Allons à l'agence de voyages. Je veux _____ un billet.

Les étudiants vont à l'agence de voyages.

3 : Bonjour ! Est-ce que je peux vous aider ? Je m'appelle (*votre nom ici*).

1 : Oui ! Je m'appelle (*votre nom ici*) et il/elle s'appelle (*le nom d'étudiant deux ici*).

3 : Enchanté ! _____ est-ce que je peux vous aider ?

2 : Mon ami(e) _____ voyager en France cet été et je veux y aller aussi. Nous voulons voir le Tour de France.

3 : Ah, le tour ! C'est un événement très intéressant. _____ allez-vous rester ?

1 : Moi, je vais rester dans un hôtel à Troyes. Puis, je vais suivre le tour _____ chaque ville.

3 : Vous savez qu'il y a plus de vingt villes, n'est-ce pas ? Vous pouvez simplement rester à Paris jusqu'à la fin du tour.

Deuxième Partie

2 : Vous avez raison. Je n'ai _____ assez d'argent. (A l'étudiant un) Peut-être nous pouvons regarder le tour à la télévision. Puis, nous pouvons aller à Paris pour regarder la fin du tour ?

1 : Oui. Je suis d'accord. Mais je _____ acheter un billet. Est-ce que je peux changer ma réservation ?

3 : Bien sûr ! Quand voulez-vous partir ? Vous _____ prendre l'avion pour Paris maintenant, n'est-ce pas ?

2 : Oui, nous voulons rester à Paris. _____ veux-tu partir ?

1 : Le tour _____ se terminer le 26 juillet. Nous pouvons rester trois ou quatre jours à Paris, peut-être.

3 : D'accord. Il y a un hôtel _____ du Champs-Élysées où le tour va se terminer. Il va être moins cher si vous voulez réserver une _____ double.

2 : As-tu _____ réservé une chambre ?

1 : Non, pas encore.

2 : Bon. Nous voulons une chambre double, s'il vous plaît. Et aussi deux billets d'avion _____ Paris. Mais, je dois faire des économies. Pouvons-nous prendre le train ? Est-ce moins cher ?

3 : En fait, le train est moins cher. Il est aussi moins cher de voyager en _____ ou à moto.

Troisième Partie

1 : _____ nous louons une voiture, nous n'avons pas besoin de rester en ville. Nous pouvons chercher un autre hôtel qui est aussi moins cher.

3 : C'est possible.

2 : Donc, _____ coûtent les billets de train ?

3 : Ils coûtent vingt euros. Et si vous voulez rester à L'Hôtel du Bonheur en dehors de Paris, une chambre double va coûter trente euros par _____.

2 : Nous allons passer de très bonnes vacances ! Qu'en penses-tu ?

1 : Je pense que nous _____ beaucoup nous amuser !

3 : A quelles dates voulez-vous partir et revenir ? Si vous partez le 23 juillet et vous revenez le 27, vous pouvez éviter beaucoup d'autres spectateurs.

2 : Merci de votre aide. _____ heure est-il maintenant ? Je _____ être en retard pour le travail.

1 : Il est 14 heures et 30. _____ est-ce que vous devez être au travail ?

2 : A 15 heures. J'ai _____ un peu de temps.

3 : Alors, passez de très bonnes vacances. Amusez-vous _____ Tour de France !

1 : Merci beaucoup Monsieur/Madame. Nous allons vous dire qui va gagner le _____.

Au revoir !

3 : Au revoir !

Word Bank

Première Partie

acheter
comment
comment
dans
où
quand
si
suis en train de
va
vais

Deuxième Partie

allez
autobus
chambre
déjà
pas encore
pour
près
quand
va
viens d'

Troisième Partie

allons
au
combien
encore
nuit
quand
quelle
si
suis sur le point d'
tout

Chapitre 11 : « Si on allait au cinéma ? » – Sketch 2

Two friends have just seen a film. Here, they discuss the film with another friend who has not yet seen it.

Première Partie

1 : Bonjour, ça va ?

2 : Ah, oui ! Ça va très bien !

3 : Oui, nous venons de voir un film vraiment super !

1 : Vraiment ? Quel film ?

2 : _____ un film Québécois de Luc Picard.

1 : Oh, j'aime bien Luc Picard et aussi les films québécois.

3 : Il était le _____ principal aussi.

2 : Oui, il a joué le rôle d'Antoine Tremblay, un « collector ».

3 : Un « collector » est un homme qui tue les autres. C'était un peu sanglant.

1 : Ça _____ de voir un film sanglant. Je n'aime pas les films avec les « collectors ».

2 : Non, ce film a _____ autres choses, comme la femme d'Antoine qui est très amusante.

3 : Oui, elle est vraiment _____.

1 : Comment est-ce qu'il s'appelle, ce film ?

3 : Il s'appelle *L'audition*. Donc il y avait aussi des acteurs !

1 : Vraiment ? Un film avec des acteurs ? D'accord...

2 : Non, non, ça veut dire qu' _____ des gens qui jouent les acteurs dans le film.

3 : Oui, Antoine, le personnage principal, décide qu'il n'aime plus la vie d'un « collector ».

1 : Et il décide de jouer ?

2 : Exactement ! Il a même un acteur célèbre comme répétiteur.

1 : Vous êtes sûrs que ce n'est pas une comédie ?

3 : Non, c'est un film avec plein de _____.

2 : J'ai pleuré à la fin... c' _____ très triste !

1 : D'accord, qu'est-ce qui se passe ?

3 : Non, je ne dis rien. Tu dois voir le film.

2 : Ça ne me dérange pas de le revoir ! Si on y _____ demain soir ?

3 : Oui, j'ai _____ de le revoir ! Comptez sur moi !

Deuxième Partie

1 : Désolé, j'ai beaucoup de _____.

2 : Si on essayait d' y aller le _____ ?

3 : _____ marche pour moi. Et toi ?

1 : Peut-être, à quelle heure ?

2 : Je crois que le film passe à 21 heures au cinéma près du centre commercial, je crois.

1 : Volontiers ! Je suis libre le samedi _____. Je dois étudier avant le film.

3 : Oui, moi aussi. Très bien. Et si on _____ avant le film ?

2 : Bonne idée, je suis _____.

3 : D'accord, où _____-nous manger ?

1 : Je connais un café _____ cinéma.

2 : Bon, nous allons manger pas loin du cinéma. On _____ à quelle

heure ?

3 : A vingt heures.

1,2, et 3 : _____ ! A samedi ! Au revoir !

Word Bank

Première Partie

allait
c'est
drame
envie
était
il y avait
ne me dit rien
personnage
plein d'
super

Deuxième Partie

allons
ça
entendu
là
mangeait
samedi
se retrouve
soir
tout près du
travail

Appendix C

Quiz Example:

Skit Activity 1 – Quiz

_____ I wrote and memorized my own skit.

_____ I filled in and memorized a pre-written skit.

I. Fill in the blank with the correct interrogative phrase using the underlined phrases in the answers as clues.

1. _____ heure est-il? Il est dix heures vingt-cinq.

2. _____ billets voulez-vous ? J'ai besoin de trois billets.

3. _____ est-ce que le train va partir ? Le train va partir demain matin.

4. _____ voulez-vous aller à Bruxelles ? Parce que ce n'est pas en France.

5. _____ allons-nous voyager à Lille ? Nous allons voyager en avion.

II. Ask a question that corresponds to the following given answers using the underlined portions as clues.

Ex : Given : Je vais à Paris. → Possible Answers : Où vas-tu? / Où est-ce que tu vas ?

1. _____
Je m'appelle Jean-Pierre.

2. _____
Il est midi et demi.

3. _____
Je veux aller en France parce que j'ai entendu que c'est un beau pays.

III. Answer the following questions according to the given schedule by using the appropriate expressions of time (venir de, être sur le point de, être en train de, aller).

Voici l'emploi du temps de la semaine de Marie. Utilisez-le pour répondre aux questions suivantes.

Lundi	Mardi	Mercredi	Jeudi	Vendredi	Samedi	Dimanche
	8h : La classe de français					
		12h : déjeuner avec Marcel	14h a 15h : étudier pour l'examen de français		14h : jouer au Schleuderball avec le club français.	
				18h à 19h : dîner avec mes parents		

1. Il est samedi à 14h 30. Le club français _____.
2. Il est mercredi à 11h 45. Marcel _____.
3. Il est vendredi à 19h 30. Les parents de Marie _____.
4. Il est jeudi à 14h 15. Marie _____.

Appendix D

Oral Presentation Rubric:

Evaluation of Oral Presentation	C'est un début! (1)	Sur le bon chemin! (2)	Ça marche bien! (3)	Vous êtes experts! (4)
Pronunciation	Most words are pronounced incorrectly. As a result, it is difficult to understand the presentation.	Some words are pronounced incorrectly, but the presentation is still understandable	Most words are pronounced correctly, making the presentation easily understandable.	All words are pronounced correctly. Any errors in pronunciation are the result of the students incorporating extra vocabulary not included in the unit.
Volume	Voice is inaudible.	Volume is too low.	Volume is adequate. Most people can hear the presentation.	Volume is excellent. All listening can easily hear the presentation
Use of French	Most of the presentation is delivered in English.	Some of the presentation is delivered in French	Most of the presentation is in French	All of the presentation is in French
Preparedness	Unprepared - students have not practiced.	Somewhat prepared - students have practiced once.	Prepared - Students have practiced a couple of times.	Well prepared - It is obvious that much practice has taken place.