

Perceptions and Practices in Language Teaching: A Survey of Experts in Literary and Cultural Studies

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Abstract

This study serves as a follow-up to VanPatten's (2015a) demographic report including the makeup of many university language departments. The present study investigates what some literary and cultural studies experts self-report regarding their training in SLA/language pedagogy, term familiarity, perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching, and classroom practices. Participants included 38 university-level US Spanish and French professors with expertise in literary and cultural studies. Findings revealed a lack of familiarity with some SLA and language teaching constructs, feedback types, and the role of explicit grammar and mechanical drills. As such, we discuss the ramifications of these findings.

Keywords: input processing, language teaching, teaching practices, feedback; survey

Background

VanPatten (2015a) reported that language departments in universities across the United States comprise an overwhelming percentage of experts in literary and cultural studies. In brief, at the time of the 2015 study, out of 344 tenured and tenure-line faculty members in Spanish, only 22 faculty (6%) had an expertise in language acquisition, and in French, there were a mere four faculty members out of 248 in the areas of language acquisition, roughly equating to two percent. The remaining 322 (94%) tenured and tenure-line faculty in Spanish and 244 (98%) in French had areas of expertise other than language acquisition, with the vast majority boasting expertise in literary and cultural studies. VanPatten (2015a) states that, "... the vast majority of scholars populating academic "language" departments are not experts in language or language acquisition" (p. 4). He elaborates that these faculty are not necessarily experts in language in the same way as language scientists who investigate language as an object of inquiry and details a series of consequences of the

lack of language experts (i.e., perpetuation of myths about language, perpetuation of myths about language acquisition and language teaching, lack of training of future professoriate, and perpetuation of the standard textbook scope and sequence). The data for the 2015 report utilized the demographic information of these Spanish and French faculty by way of their online CVs and official positions at the university and with that in mind, the present study seeks to reveal to what extent some faculty in literary and cultural studies in Spanish and French are informed in topics related to language acquisition and language teaching. This study only targeted Spanish and French faculty given that the demographic represented in VanPatten (2015a) was exclusive beyond both Spanish and French.

Specifically, the present study is interested in the following: What do faculty in literary and cultural studies report knowing about second language acquisition, language teaching, and consequently, on what beliefs are they basing their pedagogy? The present study sought to address this issue by surveying tenured and tenure-line faculty member experts in literary and cultural studies regarding their prior formal academic training in SLA and language teaching pedagogy, the current frequency with which they engage in reading or producing related academic research, and their familiarity with select terms and constructs in language acquisition and language teaching pedagogy which may ultimately guide decisions in the language classroom. The main areas of interest were language processing, the role of explicit grammar and grammar instruction, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and feedback.

Previous Research

Language learning has been an object of inquiry for millennia, but it was only recently, during the latter part of the 20th century, that this interest evolved into a science (VanPatten & Williams, 2015) and formed its own fields of research-informed second language teaching pedagogy and second language acquisition. On the acquisition side, researchers are interested in how x affects y . For example, the effects of x on acquisition (however it might be qualified in a particular research paradigm). Concomitantly, language teaching pedagogy is regularly informed by the findings of language acquisition research, and approaches are consequently drawn from this research. Given that the field of language acquisition attempts to explain how the mind works regarding the processes, products, and environments of language acquisition, it is generally accepted that language instructors can benefit from having a command of concepts in language pedagogy and SLA, particularly in light of the direct relationship between research and praxis (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Long 2009).

A brief snapshot shows that from the early 1980s until now, in theory, language teaching moved from a focus on explicit grammar as an object of study to explicit grammar coupled with mechanical drills, input-based activities, meaningful and communicative drills, and interactive activities and tasks with emphasis on meaningful communicative exchanges. During this transition, a movement known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was born out of the push to expose learners to meaning-bearing input combined with meaningful exchanges in the classroom in an effort to engage the cognitive processes involved in communication. The term CLT was used to describe language teaching practices that emphasize interaction among interlocutors during which communication comprises both the

means and the end goal. Researchers and pedagogues agreed that learners needed both exposure to comprehensible input and opportunities to interact with others in the target language in order to be successful in their language-learning pursuit (Gass & Mackey, 2015; VanPatten & Williams, 2015); therefore, grammar as an abstract object of study takes the backseat while communicative goals remain at the forefront. Attesting to the role of communication through interaction in language acquisition, Long and Robinson (1998) state that “people of all ages learn languages best, inside or outside a classroom, not by treating the languages as an object of study, but by experiencing them as a medium of communication” (p. 18). In other words, one of the leading principles of CLT, based on this line of research in language acquisition, involves providing learners with opportunities to communicate using the target language. Studies based on Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (Leeser, 2004; Mackey, 2006; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Pica et al., 2006) thereby provide support for the role of meaning-based interactive activities in language acquisition along with their viability of use in the language classroom.

One of the principal tenets of Communicative Language Teaching was instructors’ advocating for the provision of learners’ exposure to meaning-based input. Since the early 1980s, scholars have made claims regarding the role of input such as the following: Krashen (1982) claims that “comprehensible input causes acquisition” (p. 16), Lee and VanPatten (1995) state that “successful language acquisition cannot happen without comprehensible input.” (p. 29), Lee and VanPatten (2003) claim that, “Every scholar today believes that comprehensible input is a critical factor in language acquisition.” (p. 16), and finally, VanPatten and Williams (2007) state that, “acquisition will not happen for learners of a second language unless they are exposed to input” (p. 9). That being said, scholars, over the past nearly 40 years, have emphasized the imperative nature of input and its role in L2 acquisition. With that in mind, and all major theoretical frameworks in SLA posit a fundamental role for input (e.g., N. Ellis, 2007; Gass & Mackey, 2007; VanPatten, 2007; White, 2007), and for that reason, one of the primary areas of study within instructed SLA research is to investigate ways in which instruction can enhance how L2 learners process input.

Nonetheless, despite the call to shift focus from explicit grammar instruction to providing learners opportunities to process grammatical forms for meaning within a communicative context from as early as Krashen (1982), there has still been a reported predominant focus on explicit grammar instruction in the classroom (Fernández, 2008; VanPatten & Wong, 2003). In other words, in its infancy, language instructors still heavily relied on explicit grammar instruction, which was typically operationalized by imparting explicit grammar instruction by lecturing about how a particular grammatical structure is formed and how this same particular grammar form is used in a sentence. Within this same approach, what little communication in the classroom there was, was seen merely as a vehicle for a grammar-driven practice as opposed to completing task-based communicative goal-oriented interactive activities. VanPatten (1996) draws attention to this then ‘current state’ and points out that many language instructors’ common practice still maintained a heavy grammar focus in the classroom and, despite providing more opportunities for communication, the instructor was still the primary source of knowledge.

During the early and mid 1990s, a series of publications of relevant acquisition-oriented studies related to the role of input and explicit grammar information in language learning emerged, such as VanPatten and Cadierno (1993), VanPatten and Sanz (1995), and VanPatten and Oikkenon (1996), all providing empirical support for the use of input-based activities in the language classroom and providing little to no support for the role of explicit grammar information in language acquisition or mechanical drills. These studies investigated the effects of an instructional intervention known as Processing Instruction (PI) which in its complete form consists of explicit grammar information (EI), processing strategy information, and a type of input-based Focus on Form (FoF) activity (i.e., designed for learners to attend to meaning with the target form embedded) titled Structured Input (SI). For a complete overview of PI, see: VanPatten (2004).

Given the revolutionary nature of this research agenda to the fields of SLA and language teaching, it has evolved in the past 25 years into one of the most well-known research agendas, and has continued into the following decades by investigating the effects of EI in isolation and/or in combination with Structured Input (Fernández, 2008; White & DeMil, 2013) and with other forms of input (Morgan-Short & Bowden, 2006; White, 2015). EI in these studies consists of metalinguistic information about how a particular grammatical structure is formed. The findings since the early and mid-1990s to the present date have consistently indicated that exposure to input (and particularly certain types of input such as SI) is responsible for acquisition, not EI, and that mechanical drills are not necessary for language acquisition in any language, at any time (VanPatten et al., 2013).

Another topic of considerable interest in both language acquisition research and language teaching is related to the effectiveness of types of feedback provided to learners during language instruction. Feedback comes in different forms, and the two most common provisions of feedback are recasts or recalls (prompts) (Gass & Mackey, 2015). “Recasts” are a type of corrective feedback during which the instructor provides the correct form in response to a learner’s incorrect utterance. Recasts attempt to draw learners’ attention to an incorrect utterance in either oral or written form and push learners to notice the correct form while maintaining the flow of communication (Long, 1996; Ohta, 2000; Oliver, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Doughty (2001), states that recasts function by maintaining a status of an “immediately contingent focus on form” and work within a “cognitive window” (p. 252) during which learners can attend to the feedback and appropriately access the language present in their interlanguage. Recalls, on the other hand, push learners to self-correct by calling learners’ attention to the incorrect utterance; this feedback asks the learner to notice the error and self-correct. Recalls prompt the learner to pay attention to the teacher’s indication that the utterance was incorrect and waits for the learner to respond (recall) with the now correct utterance (Long, 1996; Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Numerous studies have measured the effectiveness of feedback by either comparing the effects of feedback types to each other, or by comparing the provision of feedback to the absence of exposure to feedback of any sort. These studies, while experimentally controlled, are based on conversation pairs including second language learning adults. Long, Inagaki, and Ortega (1998) investigated the effects of providing learners with either recasts or information about correct grammar. The results

of their study indicated that recasts demonstrated more effectiveness than simply providing learners with target-like grammar models. Mackey and Philp (1998) also investigated the effects of feedback and found that recasts were more effective than no feedback at all with adult ESL learners. Loewen and Erlam (2006) investigated the effectiveness of corrective feedback in an online chatroom during which elementary learners of English as a second language received either recasts or grammar information, and who were subsequently tested on timed and untimed grammaticality judgment tasks. Their results indicated that both the recast and grammar groups outperformed the control group who received no feedback at all, thereby providing supportive evidence to the effectiveness of the implementation of corrective feedback in the classroom. In their meta-analysis of 15 total studies, Russell and Spada (2006) found that overall, corrective feedback is considered a positive contributing factor to second language acquisition. For a comprehensive review of recast studies, see Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada (2001).

Although the research reviewed in the areas of input exposure, input processing, interaction (operationalized through group work in the language classroom), and feedback are not exhaustive to the many areas of interest in language acquisition research, they are simply a few of the many areas that have received durative attention in the research community that are relevant to language teachers. Given that the majority of professors in language departments across the country who have an area of expertise in literary or cultural studies are regularly tasked with teaching language courses, the present study is interested in revealing what *they* know about these terms as well as their training in language acquisition and related pedagogical fields. Based on the data reported in VanPatten (2015a), it is clear that on paper they are not experts, but perhaps they are informed practitioners with a sufficient level of familiarity to be able to make research-oriented informed decisions in their praxis. Therefore, this study seeks to provide a more internal view on the issue by reaching out directly to tenure and tenure-line faculty and asking them to self-report on whether they consider their language teaching approach to be communicative, their formal training in SLA/Language teaching pedagogy, engagement with field-relevant research, frequency with which they teach language courses, familiarity with a select few related terms and constructs, and their in-class practices.

The Current Study

The present study was thus guided by the following specific research questions:

1. How often do participants report reading or conducting research in SLA or language pedagogy?
2. What is participants' reported training in SLA and language pedagogy?
3. What are participants' reported familiarity levels with key terms and constructs in language acquisition and language teaching?
4. What are participants' reported perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching?
5. What are participants' reported perceptions of their practices in the language classroom?
6. What are participants' reported perceptions about influential factors in language acquisition?

Methods and Procedures

Participants. The participants from this study included university-level tenured and tenure-line Spanish and French language professors from various institutions in the U.S. Participants were deemed suitable for this study if they reported both having a Ph.D. in literature or a related field and holding a tenured or tenure-line position as a Spanish or French language professor at the university level. The initial participant pool consisted of 75 participants that began the survey and a final n size after attrition of 38 participants resulting from survey non-completion. The final participant pool consisted of 35 Spanish professors at the Associate Professor level, two Spanish professors at the Assistant Professor level, and one French professor at the Associate Professor level. That said, all participants are grouped together in the subsequent survey-questionnaire analyses.

Materials. The data collection materials in the present study consisted of a survey targeting 7 main areas of interest: background information, field activity (reading and conducting SLA or language teaching research), terms and familiarity in language teaching, common myths and statements about language acquisition, instructor classroom practices, and perceptions of students' needs for language acquisition. The survey consisted of a total of 38 questions; 7 questions related to participant background and profile, 3 field activity questions, 6 terms related to language teaching and 6 confidence of knowledge questions with the same terms, 16 true/false statements about common myths about language acquisition and respondents' perceptions of these claims. See Appendix A for the full list of survey questions.

Procedure. An email list of 216 professors in language departments was compiled by using university and department web pages, personal contacts, and language program listservs. The recruitment email included an invitation to participate in a study investigating language learning perceptions and practices along with a link to the survey housed on SurveyMonkey.com. Participants completed the survey online (Appendix A) and upon clicking a final 'submit' button, their results were uploaded and recorded in the online survey system. In an effort to gather the most candid data, participation in the survey was kept anonymous and no contact information was requested. For that reason, no follow-up letter or findings of the study were sent to participants. Participant responses for those that completed the survey in its entirety were recorded and subsequently submitted to simple response-percentage calculations.

Findings

Respondent Background Information and Field Activity

As a summary statistic, the survey items targeting formal training in both language teaching and language acquisition data is combined to provide a snapshot of the background information of all respondents. Based on the survey, 86% (33 out of 38) of the participants reported having taken a teaching methodology course and 65% (25 out of 38) reported having completed a course in SLA. Regarding participants' involvement in language acquisition research, 89% of all respondents (34 out of 38) reported reading empirical studies in SLA or language pedagogy either as often as weekly and monthly or as often as two to three times a year. In

terms of producing scholarship in the form of academic publications, 13% (5 out of 38) reported publishing annually in either the fields of language acquisition or language pedagogy.

In order to better understand their level of contact with language instruction, participants reported the frequency with which they routinely teach languages courses. All respondents (100%) reported either currently teaching, or having taught within the past 2 years, at least one Spanish or French language course. Additionally, 81.5% (31 out of 38) reported having taught 31 or more language courses throughout their career.

Summary of Background Information and Field Activity

Considering that the majority of participants reported having taken either a language methodology course or a course in second language acquisition (86% and 65% respectively), the participants in this study have undergone formal training in these principal areas of interest. Additionally, nearly all participants (89%) reported reading publications about either language acquisition or language teaching at least two times a year and many as often as weekly or monthly, which leads us to deduce that they are regularly engaging in relevant research. The participants in this study are experienced language teachers given the quantity and recency with which they report teaching language courses (i.e., 100% of participants reported either currently teaching or having taught a language course within the past year and 89% reported having taught more than 30 language courses throughout their career).

Respondent Familiarity in Key Terms and Concepts Related to Language Processing

In order to gauge respondents' familiarity level with some select terms and concepts in the fields of language acquisition and language teaching related to language processing, participants were asked to respond to a variety of types of survey items. The first item type asked participants to self-rate their familiarity related to a series of terms as either expert level, near-expert level, mildly familiar, or not familiar. As a follow-up item, participants were asked to respond by rating their confidence level with being able to provide an accurate definition of the terms if asked to subsequently supply one. In some cases, additional survey items related to content questions were also included. In short, the purpose of these survey items related to the terms was to find out, (a) with what level of familiarity they rated themselves; (b) if their reported ability to be able to subsequently provide a definition aligned with their stated level of familiarity; and (c) if their responses to content statements pertaining to some of the terms were accurate (i.e., myths about language acquisition). The participants were not asked to provide definitions of terms, given that this would be both labor intensive and time consuming for participants and consequently might dissuade them from completing the entire survey.

The first term in the study targeting language processing was "input." When asked to rate their familiarity with this term, 68% (26 out of 38) of participants reported being at either expert or near-expert levels, and the remaining 32% (12 out of 38) reported being either not familiar or mildly familiar with this term. Sixty-six percent of participants (25 out of 38) responded as either highly confident or con-

fidant that they could provide an accurate definition, whereas 34% (13 out of 38) responded as being mildly confident or not confident of being able to provide an accurate definition. A follow-up survey item — again, in lieu of asking for participants to provide a definition — asked participants to respond to the following claim regarding the definition of the term itself: Input includes the explanation of grammar rules. In response to this statement, 60% of participants (23 out of 38) reported that, yes, input includes the explanation of grammar rules, 8% (3 out of 38) reported that they did not know, and 32% (12 out of 38) reported that, no, input does not include the explanation of grammar rules. In this case, the correct answer is “no.” See Table 1 for a visual representation of these findings.

The second term regarding language processing about which participants were asked a series of questions was “intake.” In response to participants’ familiarity with this term, 34% (13 out of 38) reported being at expert or near-expert level, and 66% (25 out of 38) responded not being familiar with the term. As a follow-up survey item, participants were asked to rate their confidence in being able to provide an accurate definition of “intake.” The results showed that 32% (12 out of 38) of participants reported being extremely confident or confident at being able to provide an accurate definition, and 68% (26 out of 38) reported not being confident in providing an accurate definition. Table 1 presents these findings visually.

Table 1
Respondent data regarding input and intake

	Expert/near-expert	Not familiar	Confident	Not confident
Input	68%	32%	66%	34%
Intake	34%	66%	32%	68%

Summary of Reported Familiarity with Language Processing

In general, the findings for the terms related to language processing, “input” and “intake,” reveal the following. In the case of input, 68% (26 out of 38) of participants rated themselves at either expert or near-expert levels. Out of these 26 participants who self-reported being at expert or near-expert levels, 11 of them reported erroneously that input includes the explanation of grammar rules. Complicating this issue, 32% (12 out of 38) reported either not being familiar or mildly familiar with the term “input.”

In the case of the term “intake,” 34% (13 out of 38) reported being at either expert or near-expert levels, however, upon looking more closely at the responses, the following issue presents itself: 10 of the 13 participants who responded as being at expert or near-expert level also reported not being able to provide an accurate definition of intake, if asked to provide one. Additionally, 6 of the 25 participants who reported as not being familiar with the term also reported being confident that they could provide an accurate definition. How is it possible to not be familiar with a term but then self-rate as confident in providing an accurate definition? Additionally, how is it possible to be an expert (or near-expert) and self-report as not be able to provide an accurate definition? These issues will be further explored in the discussion section of the present study.

Respondent Familiarity in Key Terms and Concepts Related to Explicit Grammar and Mechanical Drills

The second series of survey items addresses the role of explicit grammar information and the use of mechanical drills in order for successful language acquisition to take place. As discussed earlier, explicit grammar information is considered explaining grammar in the abstract sense (i.e., syntactic structures, morphological derivation) and often includes the extensive explanation of grammar via paradigmatic charts. Mechanical drills are defined as those drills for which learners do not need to attend to meaning to complete (i.e., fill-in-the-blank drills with the appropriate verb form when the corresponding verb is supplied). Table 2 displays a summary of these findings.

Table 2

Respondent data regarding explicit grammar and mechanical drills

Statement	Agree	Disagree
1. Explicit grammar is necessary for successful language acquisition.	53%	47%
2. Mechanical drills are necessary to learn any second language.	37%	63%
3. Mechanical drills are necessary to learn some languages (i.e., Russian).	37%	63%
4. Mechanical drills are useful during a class session.	32%	68%
5. Mechanical drills are useful before, during, or after class, it just depends.	68%	32%
6. Mechanical drills are not necessary to successfully learn a language.	37%	63%

Summary of Reported Perceptions of Explicit Grammar and Mechanical Drills

In general, the findings for participants' responses regarding the role of explicit grammar information and mechanical drills indicate that over half of the participants (53%) consider explicit grammar a necessary component of language instruction in order for successful language acquisition to take place. Based on participant responses to the survey items regarding the role of mechanical drills, at least 37% of respondents and upwards of 68% indicate that mechanical drills are either necessary or useful at some point during instruction for successful language learning.

Respondent Perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching

The following set of survey items addresses instructors' self-reporting on their approach to language teaching as well as their perception and implementation of types of activities during Communicative Language Teaching. The purpose of these survey items is to determine if participants consider their approach to be communicative, gauge how they perceive Communicative Language Teaching, and find out some information about their class-time praxis. A summary of these findings is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Respondent perceptions of communicative language teaching, mechanical drills, and non-target language use

Statement	Agree	Disagree
1. CLT is, by nature, 'wishy-washy' and does not help learners learn grammar.	20%	80%
2. I consider my approach to language teaching as communicative.	100%	0%
3. Rehearsing dialogues (i.e., plays, scripts) is a communicative activity.	58%	42%
4. Usually, when presenting vocabulary, I read it to students and they repeat it.	32%	68%
5. Typically, students complete grammar worksheets in class.	50%	50%
6. During class, we do a lot of group work.	82%	18%
7. During group work, students use a lot of English.	53%	47%
8. During group work, students stay on task.	47%	53%
9. During class, we do a lot of translation exercises.	29%	71%

Summary of Perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching

In general, the findings for instructor perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching are two-fold. Even though 100% of participants report their approach to language teaching as communicative, responses to survey items containing statements regarding non-communicative praxis provide conflicting data. More than half of the participants (58%) consider rehearsing plays and dialogues as communicative, nearly one third of participants (32% and 29% respectively) report a call-and-response method of vocabulary presentation and completing translation exercises in class, and half of participants (50%) report completing grammar worksheets during class.

Respondent Familiarity in Key Terms and Concepts Related to Feedback

The final series of terms addressed in this survey are related to feedback in the language classroom. The first term for which participants were asked to respond is the term "recall." Again, recalls are considered a type of elicitation feedback that prompt learners to produce the correct form after an incorrect utterance is made by calling their attention to the error. In terms of familiarity, 58% (22 out of 38) reported being at either expert or near-expert levels and 42% (16 out of 38) reported not being familiar with the term. In terms of participants' confidence level at providing an accurate definition, 29% (11 out of 38) reported being extremely confident or confident, and 71% (27 out of 38) reported not being confident at providing an accurate definition, if asked.

The second term related to feedback about which participants were asked to respond was "recasts." To reiterate, recasts are considered a type of instructor feedback during which the instructor repeats the corrected form of an incorrect utterance while maintaining the conversation stream and the focus on meaning. The following data revealed itself: 55% (21 out of 38) of participants reported being at expert or near-expert levels, and 45% (17 out of 38) reported not being familiar with the term. When asked to rate their confidence level of providing an accurate definition, 50% (19 out of 38) reported not being confident with providing an accurate definition. In this case, no discrepancy with the self-reports of familiarity level and confidence in being able to provide a definition was found.

Summary of Reported Familiarity with Feedback

The findings for respondents' familiarity with two terms related to feedback, recalls and recasts, reveals the following: in both cases, over one half of the participants self-reported being at expert or near-expert levels; however, nearly one half of respondents reported not being familiar with the two terms (42% and 45% respectively). Additionally, for recalls, nearly three quarters of participants (71%) reported not feeling confident they could supply an accurate definition and in the case of "recalls," half (50%) of the participants reported the same. The data also indicates that five of the participants that self-reported to be at expert or near expert-levels for recalls reported not being able to provide an accurate definition.

Discussion

In general, the findings from the survey responses beg the question what the respondents perceive to be necessary and/or responsible for successful language acquisition. As a reminder, the overall design of the study included survey questions targeting the following topics: 1) demographic data including prior training in SLA and language teaching pedagogy, activity in, and exposure to, field-specific research; 2) terms and constructs related to language processing and feedback for which participants were asked to rate their familiarity, their confidence level in providing an accurate definition (if subsequently asked to do so), and in some cases, to respond to claims about these same targeted terms (i.e., input includes grammatical explanation.); 3) the role of explicit grammar explanation and mechanical drills for which participants were asked to respond whether they agree or disagree with a series of claims (i.e., Explicit grammar is necessary for successful language acquisition); and 4) topics related to Communicative Language Teaching and interaction for which participants responded to survey items addressing construct-specific claims (i.e., rehearsing dialogues, plays, or scripts is a communicative activity). Based on participants' responses, there are a series of findings of interest regarding the terms and constructs targeted in this study as well as respondents' exposure to relevant research and training in the fields of SLA and language teaching pedagogy.

Regarding participant background and field activity levels, 85% of all participants reported having taken a course in pedagogy, 65% a course in SLA, and 90% reported reading language acquisition or language teaching research as often as weekly, monthly, or at least twice a year. This demonstrates that both their preparation in the fields as well as their dedication to maintaining themselves informed of research is quite promising for professionals whose main area of research focus rests in literary and cultural studies. These findings suggest that value is placed on both professional preparation during their studies in addition to keeping up to date with relevant research in language acquisition and teaching. Nonetheless, the participants' experiences with preparation and research and their self-reported level of activity do not align with the results of the content-specific areas targeted in this study.

In the case of issues related to language processing, a high percentage of participants (68%) self-rated at expert or near-expert levels with the term "input," and if this finding is taken at face value in isolation, it seems quite promising. However, one intriguing issue presents itself here regarding the responses to the follow-up

survey items about the nature of input; nearly half of the participants (42%) who self-reported as experts or near-experts also agreed that “input includes the explanation of grammar rules.”

An anonymous reviewer of a previous version of this manuscript commented that if the grammar explanation is in *lingua*, then it can be input. This is a common misconception and perpetuation of myths about language acquisition, one that merits addressing here again: explaining grammar and providing input have two entirely different purposes. The former intends to explain *how* the grammar works in the abstract sense and any language used during this explanation is not what learners are focusing on to extract meaning; they are simply trying to figure out how the grammar forms presented might function mechanically. Input, on the other hand, is message-containing linguistic data that is to be processed for meaning, which often includes specific target forms presented in a meaningful context so that they can be attended to. Complicating this issue even more, 12 out of 38 participants reported not being familiar or only mildly familiar with the term “input,” despite this term being common in the literature throughout the past nearly 40 years. Although the data from the current study cannot make any direct claims about what they are using as input for their language classes, it does create more questions about actual class practices.

Similar findings present themselves through responses related to the role of explicit grammar information. To remind the reader, over half of all participants (53%) responded that explicit grammar is necessary for language acquisition to take place. The role of explicit grammar is debated in the field and there exists considerable research suggesting that it is either not necessary for successful language acquisition (VanPatten & Oikkenon, 1996; White & DeMil, 2013) or that it might be useful, but not necessarily necessary, for some target forms and not others (Fernández, 2008). The key word in the survey question was “necessary”; however, perhaps the question was not read in the strictest of senses by participants, which resulted in a range of responses. The responses to this question are either due to the saliency of the question itself, or there is in fact cause for concern regarding the perpetuation of myths about language acquisition.

Regarding the usefulness of mechanical drills, 63% of participants reported that mechanical drills are necessary to successfully learn a language, and 68% reported that they believe that mechanical drills are useful (before, during, or after class, it just depends). That said, research has demonstrated that language acquisition is facilitated by making form-meaning connections (Carroll, 2001; VanPatten, 2015b; VanPatten & Rothman, 2014; White, 1987), which mechanical drills do not facilitate. In the case of the present study, upwards of 68% of participants reported that mechanical drills were either necessary or useful, which leaves us to question why they might believe this to be true. One possible interpretation is that these participants deem mechanical drills necessary because they test learners using them and therefore consider them useful given that they prepare students for their tests or other assessment measures. Another possible interpretation is that participants do not actually know what a mechanical drill is, in which case they might interpret the survey questions to refer to any type of activity that has multiple choices or limited responses, even including meaning-based fill-in-the-blank activities or input-based

multiple-choice activities. Or finally, this could be an indicator that there is a general misconception as to the nature of language acquisition and further perpetuation of myths about language acquisition given participants' responses regarding their usefulness. Future studies need to provide participants with examples of activity and drill types asking them to comment if they would use them and why. Additional follow-up interviews also need to be conducted in order to explore this dynamic relationship between instructors and their activity selections. In the case of the present study, the survey was purposefully designed to be anonymous in order to incentivize participants and for that reason, no follow-inquiries were possible.

In terms of participant familiarity with two fundamental feedback-related terms, recalls and recasts, participant familiarity was comparably low to that of the terms related to language processing and participants' perceptions of the role of explicit grammar. Only roughly half were familiar with these terms, which leads us to question exactly what type of feedback might be used in the classroom, if any. On the other hand, perhaps the concepts are familiar to the participants but the terms used to identify these concepts are not. Could it be that the participants are implementing these types of feedback but just do not realize it? Nonetheless, the findings suggest that these terms, although used in research in SLA, are not widely familiar to the participants in this study, even though many participants reported having taken courses in SLA or language teaching and reported regularly reading research in these fields.

And finally, regarding the nature of Communicative Language Teaching, the findings of the present study suggest a similar misconception about what communication actually consists of, or at minimum, what types of activities involve communication. In the present study, all participants consider their language teaching approach to be communicative even though more than half of participants consider rehearsing plays and dialogues to be communicative. However, communication itself involves the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning, which these activities do not. In other words, rehearsing dialogues or plays does not align with what communication actually is, given that it lacks these necessary elements. That said, the data from at least half of the participants shows a lack of understanding of what must be present for communication to take place despite having reported their approach to language teaching to be communicative in nature.

Limitations, Directions for Future Research, and Conclusions

This study, of course, is not without its limitations. Although the original participant pool consisted of over 200 Spanish and French professors of varying ranks (Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Full Professor) who directly received the survey and who were asked to share the survey with their colleagues, the final participant pool for which data were collected included only 38 responding participants. Although the percentage of responses is low, it is not surprisingly low given that the recruitment method was online via email and the survey itself was lengthy. Notwithstanding, this final participant pool still provides a snapshot of responses to some questions regarding training, experience, and familiarity with a few select formal constructs in L2 teaching and acquisition. Future research needs to include

more participants to capture the responses of a higher percentage of language department faculty with areas of expertise in literary and cultural studies.

Another limitation to this study is that the survey itself is static and does not account for the dynamic nature of language professors and language teaching. The purpose of the survey was to maintain anonymity and provide some insight into a fundamental knowledge base for language teachers and those involved in language teaching and research. Future research will benefit by incorporating a more dynamic approach by implementing other methodological components such as interviews, observations, class recordings, or open-ended questions in survey form. In the case of the present study, although it is quite possible that respondents are familiar with some of the constructs addressed in this study, they were simply not familiar with the terms themselves; yet this explanation does not apply blanketly. To respond to this issue, a follow-up study can provide examples of constructs or types of feedback and ask participants whether or not they would incorporate these into their curriculum through subsequent interviews.

One final limitation to the present study is that it focused solely on a limited number of terms related to the technical aspects of acquisition. This study targeted a subset of commonly-recurring themes in SLA and language teaching including processing, feedback, explicit information, and interaction; future research needs to target a broader scope of terms related to language acquisition and language teaching. Additionally, this study did not target some other important areas related to L2 learning and teaching such as the teaching and learning of culture, intercultural communicative competence, or socio-pragmatic language skills. Naturally, language is not learned in a vacuum and these other equally-important L2-relevant domains focusing on a variety of aspects of culture need to be examined in detail in future research.

Based on the respondent data to the survey completed for this study, perhaps VanPatten (2015a) was indeed accurate in stating that "...language departments are not the best place to learn languages" (p. 12). The potential ramifications of lack of familiarity or misconceptions of the terms addressed in this study, then, continue to be the same concerns raised in VanPatten (2015a): perpetuation of myths about language, perpetuation of myths about language acquisition and language teaching, and perpetuation of lack of training of the professoriate. The implications of the findings from this study are quite clear for Instructed Second Language Acquisition – learners might still be completing mechanical drills, rehearsing memorized scripts, and practicing pronunciation through call and response, much like they were half a century ago in some language classrooms.

On a positive note, however, one additional finding in this study is that 76% of participants (29 out of 38) also reported being interested in attending language teaching workshops. To that end, the overall attendance at these workshops might increase, as well as more opportunities for workshops created, given the findings reported in this study. This may be necessary in order to dispel some of the myths and misconceptions of language acquisition and work towards a common understanding of what language acquisition is, and what language acquisition is not.

Acknowledgements

Many people read previous versions of this article and there are too many to list here. That said, we would like to especially thank Ivy Gilbert for the insight she provided during the final manuscript preparation and editing process as well as Bill VanPatten for his guidance, collegiality, and ongoing support, without which this project, and others, would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and observations. All errors and omissions remain our own.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Part 1: Background

Instructions: In this section, we would like some information about your background. Please answer all questions accurately.

1. What is the highest degree of education you have completed?

B.A./B.S. M.A./M.S. PhD. Other (explain) _____

2. Which of the following best describes your employment (check all that apply)

___ Assistant Professor

___ Associate Professor

___ Full Professor

___ Department Chair

___ Graduate Teaching Assistant

___ Full Time Instructor

___ Part Time Instructor

___ Full Time Adjunct

___ Part Time Adjunct

___ Other (explain) _____

3. Does your major field of expertise rest in (check all that apply):

___ literary or Cultural Studies

___ linguistics

___ Other (explain) _____

4. Approximately, how many beginning / intermediate language course sections have you taught (ever)?

0-----10-----20-----30-----40-----50+

5. When was the last time you taught a language course?

___ I currently teach one (or more)

___ last semester

___ last year

___ within the past 3 years

___ within the past 6 years

___ other _____

6. Have you taken a teaching methodology course?

Yes No

7. Have you taken a Second Language Acquisition course?

Yes No

Part II: Field Activity

Instructions: In this section, we would like some information about your habits. Please answer all questions accurately.

1. How often do you read literature in the field of language acquisition or language teaching (i.e., Studies in Second Language Acquisition, Foreign Language Annals)?

___ Daily

___ Weekly

___ Bi-weekly

___ Monthly

___ A few times a year

___ Twice a year

___ Once a year

___ Never

2. Are you interested in attending language teaching workshops?

Yes No

3. How often do you publish scholarly work in SLA or language teaching?

Once a year Twice a year Never Other_____

Part II: Term Familiarity

Instructions: In this section, we would like some information about your familiarity levels with some terms. Please answer all questions accurately. Rate your familiarity with the following concepts on the following scale of expert level, near-expert level, mildly familiar or not familiar.

1. Input

2. Intake

3. Output

4. Communicative Language Teaching

5. Recalls

6. Recasts

In the following section rate your confidence level with being able to provide an accurate definition of the following terms if asked to subsequently supply one by using the following scale: extremely confident, confident, not confident.

1. Input
2. Intake
3. Output
4. Communicative Language Teaching
5. Recalls
6. Recasts

Part III: Perceptions

Instructions: In this section, we would like some information about your perceptions. Please answer all questions by selecting Agree or Disagree.

1. Grammar drills are necessary to learn any second language.
2. Grammar drills are necessary to learn some languages (i.e., Russian).
3. Input includes the explanation of grammar rules.
4. Mechanical drills are most useful during a class session.
5. Mechanical drills are useful before, during, and after class, it just depends.
6. Mechanical drills are not necessary to successfully learn a language.
7. Explicit grammar is necessary for successful language acquisition.
8. CLT, by nature, is wishy-washy.
9. Rehearsing dialogues (i.e., plays, scripts) is a communicative activity.
10. Usually, when presenting vocabulary, I read it to students and they repeat it.
11. Typically, students complete grammar worksheets in class.
12. During class, we do a lot of translation exercises.
13. During class, we do a lot of group work.
14. During group work, students stay on task.
15. During group work, students use a lot of English
16. I consider my approach to language teaching as Communicative?