
The Use of Periodicals in the Foreign Language Classroom from the Perspective of the SFL

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Abstract

This article focuses on the issue of using newspapers and magazines in the foreign language (FL) classroom from the perspective of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning (SFL). The standards provide a lens through which we can analyze the use of periodicals in the FL classroom. They offer new justification for using periodicals as learning and teaching tools. This article discusses how the use of periodicals can help optimize the achievement of the goals established by the standards, particularly in educational settings far removed from the target culture.

Introduction

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning (SFL) define what students should know and be able to do in a FL at different educational levels. These standards set up learning goals and are the basis for creating a curriculum to achieve these goals. To that end, the FL standards are organized around five main goals that focus on (1) communicating in the target language in the three communicative modes: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational; (2) understanding the target culture by analyzing the products and practices that are results of its unique perspectives; (3) connecting with other disciplines and acquiring information that is only available through texts published in the target language; (4) comparing the target language and culture with one's own to better understand and develop greater tolerance for differences between the two; and (5) being able to participate in a global community by locally or remotely accessing speakers of the target language, and becoming lifelong learners.

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“...when we look for materials addressing second/foreign language skills we find that they are scarce in the list.”

Periodicals in the Classroom

The concept of using newspapers in education is not new. Newspaper publishers, both local and national, have been involved in developing educational programs for schools for decades (Cornish, 2004). The National Newspaper Association (NNA), for example, assists hundreds of newspapers and school systems by sponsoring Newspapers in Education (NIE) programs. In an effort to help teachers channel the content of newspapers into the classroom, the National Newspaper Association (1996)

published a bibliography of publications to guide teachers in using newspapers in the school curriculum. This bibliography is organized by sections, according to the content area addressed by the particular materials listed under each section. However, when we look for materials addressing second/foreign language skills we find that they are scarce in the list.

Foreign language newspapers and magazines have been recommended to foreign language teachers over the past 30 years as invaluable sources of authentic materials (Hare, 1998; Seedhouse, 1996; Long & Harlow, 1988; James & Lange, 1974). Long and Harlow (1988) point out how periodicals provide invaluable sources of authentic materials. They review the many ways newspapers help develop the “five (*sic*) foreign language skills”: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and culture. Long and Harlow's article supports the use of periodical materials based on the valuable opportunities that they provide for real interaction with the target language and culture (1988, p. 106). Along the same lines, Seedhouse (1996) explains that using periodicals is the best way to get up-to-date information for those second language learners who are not physically in a country where the target language is spoken (p. 65). Hare (1998) also supports the idea that the use of authentic materials, such as periodicals, in the foreign language classroom allows access to genuine information. One of the most up-to-date and complete collection of language activities is provided by Sanderson (1999), which shows teachers how to exploit the features and sections of English language newspapers. However, he does not address the use of foreign language periodicals. Long and Harlow (1988) include some guidelines for the preparation of periodical materials for use in the classroom, but specific activities are not suggested. In the seventies, James and Lange (1974) suggested a list of activities in English, French, German, and Spanish along with a rich bibliography on the use of newspapers and magazines in the classroom, but their suggestions need updating and reframing within the standards.

Periodicals and the Standards

The standards offer new ideas for using periodicals as tools in the classroom. They include a series of learning scenarios that describe classroom activities illustrating examples of teaching and learning that incorporate the standards. The following is one of these scenarios.

Students in Ms. Gadbois' French II class at Central High School received an article, written for a teen magazine in France, about a crime that occurred in the U.S. and the unusual sentence given to the criminals. The students discuss the crime, the pros and cons of each possible legal punishment, the view of the French writer toward the event, and how the same crime was treated in the American press. As a follow-up, students write a summary of the article" (Standards: 1.2: Interpretive Communication, and 4.2: Cultural Comparisons). (SFLL, 1999, p.76)

By having access to the magazine article, Ms. Gadbois' students have the opportunity to access an authentic text in the target language and appreciate an event through the cultural perspective of a speaker of another language.

Attempts to integrate authentic readings from periodicals in the foreign language classroom do exist in the form of the reproduction of articles in a textbook or pedagogical magazine. Using the isolated article does not expose students, however, to certain components that can be found only in the framework in which the article is embedded. Some of these components are: (1) the section in which the article is found; (2) the importance it bears in relation to the rest of the issue; (3) whether there are other items addressing the same topic — an editorial, letters to the publisher, cartoons; (4) the format of classified ads; (5) how the headlines or the captions of the photos capture the main idea; (6) how the general layout differs from U.S. periodicals. All these components provide the right context for what the standards refer to as the "cultural interpretation of texts" versus mere "reading comprehension."

The standards point out, "Ideally, students need to be able to use the target language for real communication, that is, to carry out a complex interactive process that involves [...] reading and interpreting written materials" (SFLL, 1999, p. 37). The interpretation of texts implies not only the ability to read "between the lines" (p. 37) but also to read "around the lines," or what could be referred to as the "co-text," that is, to read beyond the words to detect patterns of cultural behaviors (for example, the different relevancy that equivalent sections are given in the national and the target language newspapers.) Alvarez Evans and González (1993) put forward some interesting strategies to help students read "inside the lines, to look within themselves and compare cultural perspectives" (p. 48). By engaging our students in the type of cultural interpretation mentioned above, we are addressing the need to provide activities that incorporate high level thinking tasks. This can be accomplished in beginning classes by conducting some of the activities in the students' native language (SFLL, 1999).

In a traditional teacher-centered class, it is usually the teacher who chooses the topic, and the format of the reading is dictated by the textbook. On several occasions, the standards document refers to the importance of broadening cultural offerings, traditionally limited within the classroom and conventional textbook constraints (SFLL, 1999, p. 47-52). By

All these components provide the right context for what the standards refer to as the "cultural interpretation of texts" versus mere "reading comprehension."

offering students the opportunity to access entire issues of a magazine or newspaper, we allow them to pick a topic that interests them from among a broad choice of possibilities for personal enjoyment and enrichment (Seedhouse, 1996; SFLL, 1999). In this way, students are given the opportunity to manage their own topics. The class becomes student centered, and learning becomes resource-based, rather than teacher dependent (Hare, 1998). Only when managing the students' own topics can we be certain that they are "given interesting and challenging topics and ideas that they can read about, discuss or analyze" (SFLL, 1999, p. 31), for it is the materials that reflect their interests that students understand better. In addition, connections with other disciplines can be made, allowing students to acquire information only available in the target language, which is meeting the "Connections" goal (SFLL, 1999).

In order to provide students with up-to-date readings that encompass all the cultural characteristics present in the larger context or "co-text," we may turn to use current periodical publications in our classrooms. As a model of how this can be done, we might look at educational programs designed by current English language newspapers. The main goal of these programs is to provide teachers and students with a tool that improves critical thinking skills and a base for stimulating classroom discussions. They often include teacher guides, semester quizzes, and teaching resource packages. The activities in the teacher guides, designed for individual and/or group assignments, help students organize and use information. These activities may be adapted for part of or for an entire class period and applied to any section of the magazine. If we look at these activities with the standards' goals in mind, we will discover that they address almost every one.

The following examples are suggested activities, either adapted from current newspapers' educational programs or inspired by them, and further developed to fit the foreign language context. Their variety allows them to be adapted to different language levels, learning styles, classroom needs, and student interests. Most importantly, they address all five standards goals (Sanderson, 1999). These activities are organized by grade level and by how they address the various goals of the SFLL.

Activity 1

Activity Description: Divide the class into groups and assign each a topic area (e.g., international, sports, media, entertainment). Have students compile a list of key words specific to each group's assigned area. Identify cognates.

Suggested Grade: 4

Standard(s) addressed:

Standard 1.2. Interpretive communication: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 2.2: Products of culture. Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied.

Standard 3.2. Acquiring Information: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its culture.

Activity 2

Activity Description: Select a graph in the magazine (bar graph, pie graph, histogram). What information must be understood in order to read it, e.g., values on X and Y axes? percentages? Summarize the information presented on the graph.

Suggested Grade: 8

Standard(s) addressed:

Standard 1.2. Interpretive communication: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.3. Presentational Communication: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers in a variety of topics.

Standards 3.1. Making connections: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines (Math) through the foreign languages.

Standard 4.2. Cultural Comparison: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparison of the cultures studied and their own.

Activity 3

Activity Description: Identify the subject(s) and setting(s) of photographs accompanying articles. What are the photos' overt and subtle meanings? Do they complement the article? Evaluate the captions. Propose alternative photos and captions to illustrate the article (see Appendix I for examples.)

Suggested Grade: 4

Standard(s) addressed:

Standard 1.2. Interpretive communication: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.3. Presentational communication: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

Standard 2.1. Cultural practices: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied.

Standard 2.2: Products of culture. Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied.

Activity 4

Activity Description: Use the table of contents to preview the issue. Then divide the class into groups and assign each group a category, such as politicians, business people, economists, consumers, teachers, taxpayers, and foreign leaders. Have students determine which articles in an issue would be of special interest to each category type. Explain why.

Suggested Grade: 8 and 12

Standard(s) addressed:

Standard 1.1. Interpersonal communication: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Standard 1.2: Interpretive communication. Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Activity 5

Activity Description: Have students identify authors of articles and locate their names on the masthead. Students trace articles by specific authors over several weeks and discuss their areas of expertise and writing style. Then, they look up authors' bios on the magazine's website.

Suggested Grade: 8 and 12

Standard(s) addressed:

Standard 1.2. Interpretive communication: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 3.2. Acquiring Information: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its culture.

Standard 5.2. Lifelong learning: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Activity 6

Activity Description: Compare and contrast the way national newspapers and other news magazines treat an event with how this periodical treats it. Consider the space devoted to stories, illustrations, facts used, and whether editorializing is presented.

Suggested Grade: 8 and 12

Standard(s) addressed:

Standard 4.2. Cultural Comparison: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparison of the cultures studied and their own.

Activity 7

Activity Description: Select a letter to the editor that makes reference to a specific article. Then, have students find the article referenced and evaluate whether the letter makes a fair point. Students then write a letter about the same article from a different perspective.

Suggested Grade: 12

Standard(s) addressed:

Standard 1.2. Interpersonal communication: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.3. Presentational communication: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

Standard 3.2. Acquiring Information: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its culture.

Activity 8

Activity Description: After evaluating the political cartoons in one week's issue, students choose an article and draw a cartoon representing some aspect of it (see Appendix II for an example.)

Suggested Grade: 12

Standard(s) addressed:

Standard 1.1. Interpersonal communication: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Standards 1.3. Presentational Communication: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers in a variety of topics.

Standard 2.2: Products of culture: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied.

Activity 9

Activity Description: Read two articles from two different newspapers about a current controversial issue. Determine whether the two articles have different or similar positions, or what the political views of the authors might be (see Appendix III for an example.)

Suggested Grade: 12

Standard(s) Addressed:

Standard 1.2. Interpersonal communication: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 2.2: Products of culture: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied.

Standard 3.2. Acquiring Information: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its culture.

Activity 10

Activity Description: Read classified ads and study the format. Write your own ad following the format observed. If possible, find out how much it costs to post an ad and figure out how much you would have to pay to post the ad you wrote.

Suggested Grade: 8 and 12

Standard(s) Addressed:

Standards 1.3. Presentational Communication: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers in a variety of topics.

Standard 1.2. Interpersonal communication: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 3.2. Acquiring Information: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its culture.

All of these activities can be carried out by utilizing national and international periodicals published in the target language, both hard copy and online. Most foreign language publications have online versions which make accessibility easy. Websites provide up-to-date information and cultural authenticity of the target language (Kost, 1999). Opting for international publications versus national ones adds the possibility of comparing the native culture's views with other cultures' views of the same events, allowing students to address the "Comparisons" goal of the SFLL. Useful websites are included in Appendix IV.

Using the online versions of these publications has the advantages of immediacy and interactivity. For example, online capabilities offer the opportunity to check previous issues through the archives (this sometimes requires subscribing), thereby

“Most foreign language publications have online versions which make accessibility easy.”

allowing for the kind of activities that require checking information previously published. It also gives access to information that is not included in the body of the publication. For example, one of the activities might involve using the magazine website in order to look up the authors' biographies. An example of an interactive activity is the one provided by the "forum" section published by many of these online publications, through which readers can participate in on-going discussions about current, sometimes controversial issues (see Appendix V for an example.) This reflects the standards' call for participation in multilingual communities (SFLL, 1999, p. 63). After reading an article about a controversial current event, students read the comments in the "forum" and learn other readers' opinions, after which they can have their own in-class debate. This type of activity provides students not only with an opportunity to discuss specific topics of interest, but also with cultural information of the target language through association of words, shared knowledge, and values of native readers (Sanderson, 1999).

Conclusion

Unless FL teachers are made aware of the wealth of information and activities available through the use of periodicals, students may miss one of the most accessible opportunities to interact with the target language and culture in a meaningful way. Furthermore, using periodicals in the classroom is an effective way to address the FL Standards. The process discussed above can be adapted to any foreign language and learning situation. While complete substitution of textbooks with periodicals is not being suggested, teachers are encouraged to use periodicals to supplement them. Periodicals provide a rich and authentic interactive experience with the target language and culture and are great tools to address the foreign language standards in the classroom. As students immerse themselves in the target culture by accessing and interacting with authentic texts, they "show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment": Standard 5.2 (SFLL, 1999).

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APPENDIX I

From *El País* (Spain)

Beckham: "El Madrid ha sido mi familia"

El jugador británico del Real Madrid David Beckham ha anunciado que abandonará el equipo blanco a final de temporada. El destino del capitán inglés será Los Ángeles Galaxy, equipo integrado en la MSL norteamericana y con el que ha firmado un contrato de cinco años de duración. Beckham, de 31 años, llegó al Real Madrid en junio del 2003 procedente del Manchester United y se convierte en el futbolista más importante que firma por la competición estadounidense desde que arrancase en 1996.



[Beckham: "The Madrid has been my family"

The British soccer player of Real Madrid, David Beckham announced that he will leave the white team at the end of the season. The English captain's new team will be Los Angeles Galaxy, which belongs to the American MSL, and with which he signed a five-year contract. Beckham, who is 31, arrived to the Real Madrid in June 2003 from the Manchester United, becoming the most important soccer player signing for the USA league since its beginnings in 1996.]

From *La République* (France)

Où trouver les carburants les moins chers

Carrefour Sénart et Station U à Brie-Comte-Robert pour le gazole, les hypermarchés Leclerc de Provins et Dammarie-lès-Lys pour le sans plomb 95 étaient les moins chers le week-end dernier: depuis quelques jours, les distributeurs sont obligés d'afficher leurs prix sur un site Internet officiel.



[Where to find the least expensive fuel.

Carrefour Sénart and Station U à Brie-Comte-Robert for gas oil, and the supermarkets Leclerc de Provins and Dammarie-lès-Lys for unleaded gas, were the least expensive gas

distributors last weekend. After a few days, the distributors are forced to publish their prices in an official website.]

APPENDIX II

From *El País* (Spain)



APPENDIX III

Compare the two articles about the same news:

El País

ETA reventó la tregua con un atentado en Barajas que deja dos desaparecidos*
JORGE A. RODRÍGUEZ / F. JAVIER BARROSO - Madrid - 31/12/2006

ETA reventó ayer con un coche bomba el alto el fuego que declaró el 22 de marzo. A las ocho de la mañana, apenas 20 horas después de que José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero lanzara un mensaje optimista sobre la marcha del proceso de paz, un comunicante anónimo anunciaba en nombre de ETA el estallido, a las nueve de la mañana, de un coche bomba en el aparcamiento D de la Terminal 4 del aeropuerto de Barajas (Madrid).

Washington Post

Car Bomb at Madrid Airport Breaks Truce
MAR ROMAN (AP Online) 12/30/2006

...A powerful car bomb exploded at Madrid's international airport on Saturday and Spain's government, blaming the Basque group ETA, ended peace talks with the separatists. The blast left two people missing and 26 injured, most with damage to their ears from the wave's impact.

[ETA bursts the truce with an attack in Barajas leaving two missing people

ETA burst with a car-bomb the truce declared on March 22. At 8:00am, merely 20 hours after Primer Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero sent an optimistic message about the development of the peace talks, an anonymous source announced in the name of ETA the explosion of a car-bomb in the parking lot D of terminal 4 in Barajas Airport (Madrid).]

APPENDIX IV

Periodicals on the Web

English:	http://www.nytimes.com http://www.usatoday.com http://www.washingtonpost.com http://www.time.com/time/ http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3032542/site/newsweek/ http://www.mirror.co.uk http://www.timesonline.co.uk/global/ http://observer.guardian.co.uk/
French:	http://www.lemonde.fr/ http://www.ledevoir.com/index.html http://www.lefigaro.fr/ http://www.lexpress.presse.fr/info/
German:	http://www.welt.de/ http://www.tages-anzeiger.ch/ http://www.rp-online.de/public/home
Spanish:	http://www.elpais.es/ http://www.el-mundo.es/diario/index.html http://www.nacion.com/ http://www.emol.com/
Russian:	http://www.pravda.ru/ http://www.relis.ru/ http://www.ropnet.ru/
Japanese:	http://www.mainichi.co.jp/ http://www.asahi.com/ http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/ http://www.japantimes.co.jp/

APPENDIX V

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¿Qué opina de la fiebre de construcción de rascacielos totémicos en las ciudades españolas?

[Opciones*](#)

moderador

Ayer, 07:48

Publicado: [#1](#)

¿Qué opina de la fiebre de construcción de rascacielos totémicos en las ciudades españolas?

Usuario avanzado

Pregunta suscitada por el artículo [El Lugar soy Yo](#), de Salvador Moreno Peralta, publicado en la edición de hoy.

Grupo: Moderadores

Mensajes: 521

Registrado: 19/11/2006

Miembro n°: 7

Este foro permanecerá abierto hasta el próximo 13 de enero a las 11:00 horas. Si desean continuar el debate, podrán hacerlo en nuestro foro de España

[off](#)

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MULTICITA

[citar y resp.](#)

disasan

Ayer, 10:36

Publicado: [#2](#)

Usuario novel

Yo creo que es un poco complejo de inferioridad: vamos a construir rascacielos, y así parece que somos más ciudad, o más importante, o así llamamos más la atención y se fijan más en nosotros. Por un lado, me parece una versión abominable de la especulación urbanística. Por otro, me parece fruto de una modernidad mal entendida. Y no hablemos del tremendo impacto sobre el paisaje.

Grupo: Members

Mensajes: 1

Registrado: Ayer, 10:33

Miembro n°: 1.937

[Moderator:

What do you think about the building of gigantic skyscrapers in Spanish cities?

Questions prompted by the article "The Place is Me" by Salvador Moreno Peralta, published in today's edition.

This forum will be open until 11:00am on January 13. If you would like to continue with the debate, you can do it in our Spain forum.

Participant:

I think it is a little bit of an inferiority complex: Let's built skyscrapers, so it looks like we are more of a city, or more important, or this way we draw more attention to ourselves. On the one hand, it seems to me an abominable version of urban speculation. On the other, it seems the results or a misunderstood modernity. And don't even mention the huge impact on the landscape.]

* Opciones:

My Asistente

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Cambiar a: Outline

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