

MEETING PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE STANDARDS IN THE FL CLASSROOM IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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This paper examines the notion of linguistic competence within the context of developing professional standards for foreign language teachers. It focuses on specific language deficiencies recorded during observation of Spanish teachers in the classroom, and provides an initial indication of the need to provide some degree of structured support for competence enhancement in the foreign language. The observation is made that whereas FL teachers may have “latent” knowledge of some fundamental lexical and semantic areas of the language, this knowledge does not always translate into appropriate application. Essentially, the role of the FL teacher as model, resource, and inspirer is diminished when the language used in the classroom shows hesitation, insecurity, inaccuracy, and lack of practice. Finally, some suggestions are made about how teachers can access opportunities for improving their proficiency in the foreign language, at both the personal and the policy level.

Introduction

Much of what we read and learn about foreign language (FL) teaching today is derived from work done in the United States, Europe, and Australia. Current standards and practices derive from policies designed by leading associations in the field such as the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Internationally, standards for FL teachers are now evolving.

FL teachers in Trinidad and Tobago currently qualify to teach in the secondary school system with a bachelor’s degree in the relevant language. They do not require teacher training. Any such training is in-service and optional. The recognized option is the one-year, part-time, postgraduate Diploma in Education (Dip.Ed.) offered at the School of

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Education of the Faculty of Humanities and Education at The University of the West Indies (UWI). If one examines systems elsewhere, for example in the United States, there are entry requirements for FL teachers. Their level of proficiency has to be ascertained in order for them to practise in the classroom. The ever-increasing emphasis on proficiency and meaningful communication signals the important role the teacher has to play in using the target language (TL) in the classroom. Though lesson planning and knowledge of learning theories may be key ingredients in the teacher's portfolio, the ability to comfortably engage with the TL and to inspire students to do the same is one professional requirement that is much downplayed in discussions of classroom practice generally.

Literature Review

The attention paid to FL teacher preparation focuses to a large extent on knowledge of learning theories, language acquisition, and teaching methodologies. Embedded in all of these areas is the understood requirement of teacher proficiency in the TL. Often, this component is not even mentioned or mentioned almost as an afterthought. In proposing five hypotheses on methodology and proficiency in the teaching of foreign languages, Omaggio Hadley (1993) suggests that opportunities must be provided for students to practise using the language in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture (p. 79). As a corollary to this, she adds that "authentic language should be used in instruction wherever possible" (p. 82). In a final comment she states:

It is also important to remember that natural language includes the comprehensible input provided by the teacher in everyday exchanges in the instructional setting that are communicative in nature, from giving directions to recounting personal anecdotes in the target language. The proficiency-oriented classroom is one in which such natural acquisition opportunities are exploited as fully as possible. (p. 83)

While not downplaying the evident value of pedagogical skills, educators at all levels need to recognize that there is a common tendency to isolate linguistic competence from overall discussions of teacher competence. There is also the contrasting tendency in which linguistic proficiency is

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highlighted at the expense of overall teacher competence. A report compiled by Briguglio and Kirkpatrick (1996, p. 34) found that the main area of concern of teachers interviewed was “linguistic proficiency.” The writers’ concern was whether researchers and educators were viewing FL teaching holistically enough. But once we decide to focus on proficiency in the language domain, we recognize that the current trend is toward communication and functionality as opposed to discrete-point learning. In FL teacher education programmes, it seems to be the norm to stress that *accuracy* is only *one* component of proficiency so that teachers in the classroom would not overemphasize this element in their teaching as was the norm in “classrooms of old.” What is therefore expected of teachers’ language use in the classroom?

Even before Omaggio Hadley’s (1993) emphasis on the use of the TL in the classroom, the teacher’s role as the initiator of interaction in the classroom was recognized (Flanders, 1970; Moskowitz, 1971, 1976 as cited in Brown, 1994). Such use was seen to be combined with all other forms of interaction in the classroom. Characteristics of the “good” FL teacher also point to ease of use of the TL as a model, to inspire its use, and to inspire students’ confidence in the teacher. Yet, FL teachers themselves are often concerned about their own linguistic proficiency and may be seen to be reluctant to use the TL communicatively in the classroom. In a report prepared for the National Asian Languages/Studies Strategy for Australian Schools (NALSAS) Task Force by Simpson Norris Pty Limited (1999, p. 5), it is stated that there is currently a perception that language teachers are not as proficient as is desirable. An interviewee stated that “as soon as someone uses the term language teacher proficiency, I think tragedy, sadness, distance, cost, opportunity, lack of confidence, lack of awareness of low levels of proficiency on the part of teachers” (p. 6).

Simpson Norris Pty Limited (1999) quotes Tedick and Tischer (1996, p. 415) who refer to the “constant challenge that second language teachers face in developing and maintaining language proficiency,” and suggests that the benefits from a five-week immersion experience for pre- and in-service teachers of French, German, and Spanish may have been related to a more increased comfort level than actual proficiency. Bell (2005) conducted a survey of 457 ACTFL members, of whom more than 94

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percent agreed that an effective FL teacher uses the TL competently, and uses it as the predominant means of classroom communication.

Lafayette (1993) suggests that language proficiency is one of the three competencies that must encompass language teachers' subject matter content knowledge, and Vélez-Rendón (2002) argues that it is crucial for effective teaching. She points out that, usually, the appropriate level of proficiency for teachers, based on the ACTFL guidelines, should at a minimum be Advanced Low. In evaluating the professional development of teachers in California, Lozano, Sung, Padilla, & Silva (2002) found that apart from support in classroom management, sequencing lesson plans, and incorporating the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (ACTFL, 1999), teachers needed support in developing language skills. This has implications for the nature of FL teacher preparation—both pre-service and ongoing—and the role of teachers themselves in their own professional development.

In Trinidad and Tobago, though there has been a recent thrust towards the teaching of Spanish as a FL, a parallel preparation of teachers in linguistic proficiency has not occurred. Almost 20 years ago, at the Inaugural Meeting of the Caribbean Language Conference, it was observed that since teaching for communication implies communicative ability on the teacher's part, this may entail the introduction of measures for teacher certification to ensure that teachers bring to the classroom the level of language proficiency and knowledge of the target culture that is essential for effective delivery of a communicative programme. (Morris, 1989, p. 51)

Currently, there is some ongoing discussion at UWI among the Department of Liberal Arts, the Instructional Development Unit, and the Foreign Language Curriculum Department of the School of Education with regard to enhancing the competence of FL teachers in the classroom, both linguistically and technically. However, there is as yet no provision targeted to the specific linguistic needs of the FL language teacher, whether pre-service or in-service.

Research in teacher education, generally, has shown that reflection is a useful tool for self-diagnosis and self-development. There is some evidence from teachers' reflections that the recommended use of the TL can be a challenge to teachers to improve their own linguistic skills

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(Morris & Yamin-Ali, 2005). If one bears in mind that teachers' development is not static, but ongoing, and that "the fundamental processes of professional learning are preserved in the journey from student teacher to expert practitioner" (Burroughs-Lange & Lange, 1994, p. 51), then "error, success and refinement" (Shulman, 1987, p. 4) would characterize the professional lives of FL teachers, not only pedagogically, but on the linguistic continuum.

Rationale for Research

FL teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago, though poised to treat with teachers' actual needs in the classroom, is not yet supported by official policy in terms of specific standards for FL teachers. While there is, in theory, a small-scale introduction of clinical supervision, through the appointment of Heads of Departments in some schools, it is insufficient and does not yet translate into a mechanism for ongoing support for the practising teacher.

If we were to be guided by the *Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* (ACTFL/NCATE, 2002), we would recognize its policy of emphasizing the development of teachers' oral proficiency as well as ongoing assessment of their oral proficiency together with diagnostic feedback. The standards also advocate the provision of opportunities for teachers to participate in a structured study abroad programme and/or intensive immersion experience in a TL community.

In order to facilitate such development of FL teachers, both FL teacher preparation programme developers and teachers themselves need to be aware of the particular areas of linguistic development that require attention for effective use in the classroom. With this in mind, this examination of TL use in the FL classroom was conducted.

The questions that this study sought to answer were:

1. What are teachers' views of and responses to their use of the Target Language (TL) in the classroom?
2. What areas for improvement are reflected in teachers' use of the TL in the classroom?

Method

The study is situated in the qualitative research paradigm and is an instrumental case study. Analysis is interpretive as it seeks to understand the reflections and practice of FL teachers with regard to linguistic proficiency and use of the TL in the classroom. For the second research question, quantities are used only in order to underscore that it is not the frequency of the error that is being highlighted but the overall nature of the error, and that the fact that it occurs at all is significant to the ensuing discussion.

Due to the context of the research, it was possible and practical to employ the “participant-as-observer” technique since this researcher is a lecturer on the Dip.Ed. programme, with responsibility for the Foreign Language Education component of the programme. Data collection was therefore a natural process and not engineered specifically for the purpose of this research.

The sample used in this study was purposive. The participants were in-service Spanish teachers enrolled in the Dip.Ed. postgraduate programme at the School of Education (SOE) on the St. Augustine campus of UWI. Eight Spanish teachers completed the programme in 2005 when the total intake was nine. The other teacher was a teacher of French. Seven Spanish teachers were supervised by this researcher in 2005/2006, when the total intake, inclusive of French, was 16. They all teach at the secondary level and entered teaching with a bachelor’s degree in either Spanish or French, or both. There is no other provision for long-term, in-service training for FL secondary school teachers locally. The small sample therefore represents 100% of the researcher’s Spanish students from two consecutive years, totalling 15 students.

Data were collected via observation records and journal entries. Both these sources constitute elements of the Dip.Ed. programme, which requires student teachers to reflect on their experiences and learning during the course of the year (July–May). Classroom practice was observed and recorded by the teacher-educator (this researcher). These records indicated extent of use of the TL, general proficiency level, and types of linguistic errors made. Feedback conference records were also analysed and categorized, focusing on teachers’ reactions and

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interpretations of their engagement with the TL. In their journal entries, teachers selected the areas they wished to focus on for reflection. From this source, comments pertinent to TL use in the classroom were categorized and interpreted.

Teachers' views and responses were seen as a significant factor in this study because they may be the driving force behind their practice, or they may provide explanations for the strengths or weaknesses observed in the context of their linguistic proficiency. They can be useful in determining the kinds of help or encouragement they need. This is supported by research conducted by Stritikus (2005) in which he proposes that spaces must be created in teacher preparation programmes for discussion of teachers' beliefs and their local settings. In addition to this, research in the field has pointed to the advantages that reflective practice can bring to the classroom (Haynes, 1995; Schon, 1983; Wallace, 1991).

Examination of areas of improvement reflected in the teachers' use of the TL in the classroom would guide the way for planning to meet professional standards in the local FL classroom. Such analysis would indeed call for collaboration among the employer—the Ministry of Education, specifically the Foreign Language Curriculum Officer—the Foreign Language Department of UWI, and the School of Education, UWI in a bid to ensure that FL teachers are well equipped to maximize their students' opportunity for optimum language learning in the classroom.

Perhaps one limitation of this study is that it reflects the practice of teachers whose sensitivity to the use of the TL may be higher than the norm, since it is an element of teaching practice that is highlighted for attention within the programme. Another, clearly, is that the sample cannot be said to represent the body of FL teachers in a general way. It is merely indicative of pockets of practice and attitudes. However, it does point the way for parallel or wider-ranging studies of a similar nature.

Findings

In this section the data will be analysed according to each of the two research questions.

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Research Question #1 (Based on comments from teachers' journals)
What are teachers' views of and responses to their use of the target language in the classroom?

Hesitation/Reluctance

In most instances, student teachers reported that they had usually been hesitant to use the TL during lessons for two main reasons. One was that they did not think that their students would be comfortable. Some even reported that their students were frustrated:

I was very sceptical about this (using the TL), since in my experience at _____ College, any attempt that I make to use purely Spanish is met with blank stares or confused looks from the students.

Although I use French or Spanish in class and tell my students that they have to use it, I am not consistent with it. Sometimes I do not use it (especially when explaining a grammar point).

It makes no sense speaking in Spanish to my Form Ones since they will not understand me.

The other reason was that the easier, more manageable way was to resort to the native language, either by conducting the class in English or by translating the TL into English even when it is used. This is illustrated in the reflections of a French teacher on her belief prior to the Dip.Ed. programme:

I really thought that by using the native language in class I was making life easier for myself and my students.

In an attempt to use the TL consistently in the classroom, a Spanish teacher reported on her students' reactions:

At first my students seemed perplexed, and in written feedback, many asked for translation.

No doubt students and, admittedly, teachers, resort to their comfort zone, which means functioning in their native language. Students are seen to react negatively to the consistent use of the TL when their prior

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experience has not provided them with that exposure. From experience in other FL classrooms locally, where the FL is used consistently by the teacher from the first year of instruction, it has been observed that students are able, at all levels, to function naturally and comfortably in the language. They comprehend and produce it with more ease.

A teacher's estimation of her own competence was seen to be another factor hindering her from using the TL extensively in the classroom:

I was wary at first, and scared that my own command of Spanish would not measure up.

Generally, early reaction to the suggestion that they should use the TL as much as possible indicates discomfort and some even comment that it would be difficult.

Students' improvement

Despite teachers' hesitancy in using the TL, some reported that they had seen improvement in their students' own use of and response to it:

I am feeling so happy today...my Form One students are beginning to speak in Spanish in my class....I am giving to them each day what I refer to as "*Frases de hoy*" which, as I give it to them, I begin to use in the classroom while speaking to them in Spanish.... My reservations about using the target language in class are diminishing with each passing day.

Another student teacher reported on the positive effects of using the TL extensively in the lower forms for the first time:

This is the first time that I have ever used the target language almost exclusively at these levels. It became clear that students at the First Form level were very enthusiastic about hearing Spanish spoken. Most students understood most of what was said....At the Third Form level the results were very similar. I have concluded therefore that the predominant use of the target language is of benefit even at the lower levels. This practice will certainly be continued in my classes.

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Self-improvement

Despite their early hesitation due to their feelings of linguistic inadequacy, there was also evidence that some teachers recognized that using the TL consistently in their classrooms was an opportunity for them to practise and to become more confident. In addition to the satisfaction they felt when their students' competence developed as a result of the exposure to the TL, self-improvement was another source of satisfaction for some teachers:

However, the more Spanish I speak myself, the more fluent I get.

Additionally, as a teacher using the foreign language in class, I will be challenged to improve my linguistic skills.

Even though not every teacher made the overt observation that self-improvement was an obvious benefit from classroom use, classroom observation has shown that as teachers attempted to use the TL more, they became more comfortable, confident, and used it with more ease.

Recognition of significance of teacher's TL use in the classroom

Modelling has been identified as an important factor in the teaching/learning experience. The recognition that the teachers' behaviour in the classroom is a source of learning for the students is one that has far-reaching consequences for teacher practice. Teachers on the Dip.Ed. programme read and hear about the benefits of the teacher's use of the TL in the classroom. When they enter the programme, they come with their own theories of why they should or should not use it. Some are convinced that their students would be too confused and thus it would be a hindrance. Some find it too tiring mentally, and others feel overwhelmed due to their own lack of proficiency in the language. Once they have begun their sessions in theory and practice, new learnings become evident:

I realize that my students' confidence in their oral proficiency was linked to my own use of the target language in the classroom. One of my major challenges therefore was to motivate my students to become risk-takers by my own example.

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One other teacher also commented on her role as model when she said that:

The classroom has its limitations so the teacher must make using the target language the norm in order to encourage students to follow suit.

Teacher-as-resource is another element that arose out of the reports of two teachers on the programme. In the case of one of these teachers, the students come from a semi-rural background where the likelihood of practice of the TL outside of the classroom is slim:

I am realizing that I am possibly the only contact many of them have with spoken Spanish, and as a result I should expose them to as much spoken Spanish as possible.

Inspiring students to use the TL is yet another benefit to be derived from exposure via the teacher. One Spanish teacher spoke about one of the things she remembered about her favourite teacher—her Spanish teacher—who:

never failed to stop me in the corridor to speak to me in Spanish – everyday!...I always said to myself, “If ever you become a teacher, you must be just like Mr. _____.”

The sentiments and observations related above reflect the thoughts of teachers as they were prompted to dwell on their professional and personal development throughout their year of the Dip.Ed. experience. The fact that they chose to remark on the use of the TL points to the significant place it holds in the among the challenges that FL teachers face. It also becomes clear that there are issues to be addressed or re-addressed in formulating programmes that prepare FL teachers for the classroom.

Research Question #2 (Based on observation in the classroom)

What areas for improvement are reflected in teachers’ use of the TL in the classroom?

The teachers observed in the context of this study have varying levels of linguistic proficiency in the FL or languages they teach. While this study does not measure their linguistic proficiency holistically via the medium

of a proficiency scale, discrete linguistic details in their use of the FL point to areas of weakness and consequent need for attention. These areas are categorized under the broad headings of *vocabulary*, *grammar*, and *pronunciation*. The details from observation are presented in the following tables and then discussed. The letters A-O have been substituted for the teachers' names.

Vocabulary

Table 1. Vocabulary Errors Made by Teachers in the Classroom

Errors	Intended Meaning	Frequency	Teachers	Correct Version
1. actora	Actress	1	A	actriz
2. pretender	to pretend	1	C	fingir
3. acente	Accent	1	F	acento
4. custard	Custard	1	F	flan
5. encontrar	to meet	2	G, L	conocer (to meet for the first time)
6. tratar de	to treat (someone)	1	L	tratar a (to treat)
7. después de	afterward	1	H	después
8. no más	no longer	1	H	ya no
9. trabajas	Jobs	1	H	trabajos
10. pagar atención	to pay attention	1	H	prestar atención
11. revisar	to revise	1	H	reparar
12. saber	to know (someone)	1	J	conocer
13. niños	Teenage boys	1	F	chicos

With the exception of three words (*actriz*, *pretender*, *flan*), the words in Table 1 can be considered to be high frequency words in Spanish. Whether these errors may be attributed to either nervousness or ignorance, one can propose, with some degree of certainty, the source of the error in most cases.

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Some of the errors stem from opting for the first choice that comes to mind—the fabrication of what seems to be a cognate. This seems to be the case for *pretender* and *revisar*, which are in fact Spanish words, but their use is incorrect in the context. In the case of *actora*, a general rule was applied whereas this word is an exception to the rule. *Pagar* is a literal translation of “to pay” and is incorrect in this context, as is the case of *no más*. Both *acente* and *custard* point to ignorance on the speaker’s part, as the first seems to have been fabricated by attaching a vowel to the English word and there was no attempt to translate the second one. The ability to distinguish between *encontrar* and *conocer*, and *saber* and *conocer* is not always spontaneous among speakers of Spanish as a second language. Though it is most likely that the teacher knows the distinction in theory, spontaneous use does not reflect this understanding. Lack of practice may account for this deficiency.

The use of both *tratar de* and *después de* seems to suggest that since these are the more common uses to which the user is accustomed—attaching the preposition—spontaneous use includes the preposition *de*. It is likely that when they studied the language, they were required to place emphasis on phrases that required a preposition. There are many textbooks that highlight this aspect of the language and it is an error that is usually emphasized by teachers. These users apparently view the item as a vocabulary item and ignore its grammatical component. *Trabajas* may be a slip on the teacher’s part, or minor confusion emanating from the two ‘a’s that come in the first part of the word. The correct version *trabajos* is far too common to suggest that this was a word not known by the teacher.

The two teachers making most errors were F (5) and H (3). Though they are enthusiastic in the classroom, their own exposure to native speakers has been minimal. Each has been teaching Spanish for over five years and both received their bachelor’s degree from the same university. Overall, though, the frequency of errors of most of the teachers is not high; however, the nature of the errors points to a need for more familiarization with common elements of the language.

Grammar

Table 2. Grammatical Errors Made by Teachers in the Classroom

Errors	Frequency	Teachers	Correct Version
Verbs — Instructions			
1. Repiten	2	B, F	Repitan
2. Recorden	1	F	Recuerdan
3. Abren	1	L	Abran
4. Miran	1	L	Miren
5. Escuchan	1	L	Escuchen
6. Buscan	1	I	Busquen
Verbs — Gustar			
1. Me gustan a las chicas	1	C	Me gustan las chicas
2. Les gustan el dibujo	1	D	Les gusta el dibujo
3. Les gustan el pollo	1	F	Les gusta el pollo
Verbs — Agreement			
1. Deseas que ella te acompañes	1	E	Deseas que ella te acompañe
2. Todo el mundo han terminado	1	L	Todo el mundo ha terminado
3. Tú es	1	J	Tú eres
Verbs — Haber			
1. Habrán cinco espectáculos	1	F	Habrán cinco espectáculos
2. ¿Cuántas competiciones habrán?	1	F	¿Cuántas competiciones habrá?
Verbs — Past Participle			
1. Terminadas?	1	K	(Han) terminado?
2. Están interesada	1	L	Están interesadas <i>or</i> Les interesa
Verbs — Subjunctive			
1. Quiero que tú responder	1	L	Quiero que tú respondas

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Errors	Frequency	Teachers	Correct Version
2. Quiero que cada persona decir	1	L	Quiero que cada persona diga
3. Quiero que tú preguntas	1	L	Quiero que tú preguntes
4. Quiero que los estudiantes arreglan	1	L	Quiero que los estudiantes arreglen
Verbs — Ser vs. Estar			
1. Deben ser en casa	1	J	Deben estar
Verbs — Reflexive			
1. ¿Qué pones?	1	B	¿Qué te pones?
2. Me llamo es	1	L	Me llamo
3. Quedarán	1	H	Se quedarán
Prepositions			
1. (un regalo) <u>por</u> mi padre	1	D	Para mi padre
2. Un espectáculo <u>a</u> la escuela (repeated error 4 times by same person)	1	F	Un espectáculo en la escuela
3. Servir el hombre; ayudando su mamá	1	L	Servir al hombre; ayudando a su mamá
Pronouns			
1. De tu mismo	1	F	De ti mismo
2. <i>Tú</i> and <i>usted</i> to address same student	1	J	Either one should be used consistently
3. Los estudiantes quien	1	L	Los estudiantes quienes
Nouns			
1. El foto	1	F	La foto
2. El orden	1	J	La orden
3. Puerta España	1	F	Puerto de España
Adjectives			
1. Respuesta rápido	1	F	Respuesta rápida
Adverbs			
1. Mucho difícil	1	F	Muy difícil

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Errors	Frequency	Teachers	Correct Version
Numbers			
1. Cien treinta y ocho	1	L	Ciento treinta y ocho
Questions			
1. ¿Qué es la interacción?	1	K	¿Cuál es la interacción?
2. ¿Qué es su nacionalidad?	1	L	¿Cuál es su nacionalidad?
3. ¿Cómo los hombres ven a las mujeres?	1	L	¿Cómo ven los hombres a las mujeres?
4. ¿Quién está hablando de?	1	L	¿De qué está hablando?
5. ¿Por qué X odia a Y?	1	L	¿Por qué odia X a Y?
6. ¿Adónde tendrá lugar?	1	F	¿(En) dónde tendrá lugar?

As seen in Table 2, teachers made a wide variety of grammatical errors. In most cases the error was made once by one person, but overall they represent a wide range of the fundamentals of Spanish syntax. In four instances, the same teacher made the same type of error more than once, for example, teacher L made four errors in the use of the subjunctive and four errors in the formation of questions, and teacher F made two errors with the use of *haber*.

Bearing in mind that some teachers were observed on four occasions over at least eight teaching periods, and some on two occasions over an average of three to four lessons, the errors appear to be too many. An important factor to be considered is that, except for two types, these errors occurred during speech and not in the written form. The two types that did appear in a handout used by the teacher were the incorrect use of *haber* and the use of *a* instead of *en* for location. These two errors were used together within the same context. On none of these occasions did the teacher self-correct or stumble. Since none of the above items were actual teaching points within any of the teacher's lessons, it is not known

whether the teacher has control of the items in another format. That is to say, if the teacher had to actually teach a lesson presenting the item formally and giving students oral or written structured practice, there is no evidence available to suggest that the teacher's content knowledge, which, especially in a linguistic situation, is far removed from its application.

Again, it is apparent that teacher L is among those making the most grammatical errors (17), in addition to F (12), and to a lesser extent J (4). F's errors span a number of grammatical areas, totalling 9 out of 15 categories presented here. L's errors also span nine of the categories, but are more frequent in question formation, use of the subjunctive, and using the imperative form of the verb.

Table 3. Pronunciation Errors Made by Teachers in the Classroom

Pronunciation	Frequency	Teachers	Correct Version
Asist <u>ir</u> é	1	H	asistir <u>e</u>
Viaj <u>ar</u> é	1	H	viajar <u>e</u>
Trabaj <u>ar</u> é	1	H	trabajar <u>e</u>
Un <u>iv</u> ersidad	1	H	universid <u>ad</u>
Ag <u>u</u> stín	1	H	Agust <u>ín</u>
Neces <u>it</u> o	1	H	neces <u>ito</u>

Pronunciation errors were not frequent. In Table 3 all the errors were made by the same teacher. One can surmise that the first three errors are related to the sound of the infinitive from which the form comes. In the infinitive form the stress goes on the syllable containing the last 'r.' The last three errors appear to stem from native language interference, as the stress in the Spanish word was placed exactly where it is in the English word.

There were three teachers who did not appear in the data as there were no errors recorded during their classroom visits. Two of them have been teaching for over 20 years and demonstrated mastery of grammar and vocabulary when using Spanish in the classroom. They were also among those teachers who spoke Spanish most frequently during their teaching.

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The third is a comparatively junior teacher teaching for less than 10 years, but who excelled at the language both at the secondary and tertiary levels, during which she had extensive exposure to the TL and culture through frequent visits to Latin America.

Discussion and Recommendations

The data presented show that there are areas of deficiency in Spanish teachers' vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. This does not mean to say that they are less proficient than their counterparts in any other part of the world. After all, to varying degrees, they have all been successful at internationally recognized examinations. In Trinidad and Tobago, FL teachers have only recently begun to attempt to prepare their students to be communicative in the TL. However, it must be remembered that most of the teachers themselves have not benefited from such an approach. Many of them are still nervous about using the TL, especially when being observed in the classroom.

It is also important to note that some of the errors noted are common errors for the average non-native speaker, and may even be deemed "high frequency" and be easily forgiven by the native speaker. Yet one has to consider that if professional standards are a target for educators and policy makers, then those standards have to be spelt out in accordance with the needs of the society and the education system. One would assume that teachers of the language must be at a higher level of proficiency than the students being taught, at least Advanced Low according to the ACTFL proficiency scale.

The Personal Level

I have attempted to account for some errors, and while errors are a step towards refinement (Shulman, 1987), there remains the reality that teachers, in their preparation for teaching—pre-service and in-service—need much more opportunities for oral practice, both in and out of the classroom setting.

My principal suggestion is that teachers become the monitors of their own proficiency, thereby maximizing every opportunity to enhance their use of the TL. Formal learning settings will not necessarily furnish them

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with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they require. “Attitudes” is an important component of this preparation package. The attitude must be one of a burning desire to reach “educated native speaker” proficiency. With such an ambitious goal, the learner would always be striving. FL teachers need to become proactive if they are to rise above feelings of inadequacy in the classroom and in other settings. This would assume a lifestyle that would incorporate constant exposure to the language in the written and aural forms in authentic cultural settings. This obviously suggests travel to countries where the language is spoken. As some teachers in the system already do, travel to TL destinations should become the obvious holiday option. Some teachers learn along with their students on school trips. Another suggestion is that they offer their services to travel agencies as travel guides in exchange for travel expenses.

It must be noted that a professional association of Spanish teachers does not exist in Trinidad and Tobago. Such an association has to be formed through the impetus of teachers themselves. Conversation groups in Spanish and sharing of audio-visual material to enhance their own learning is one of the major benefits to be derived from such an initiative.

The Policy Level

The fact that there are no professional standards set for FL teachers speaks to the need to develop a policy that would effect such. University students graduate with varying degrees of competencies, which may not always ensure that they are effective teachers in terms of content and aptitude for teaching. The Ministry of Education would need to ascertain its needs in terms of teacher capability in order to ensure that it is placing competent persons in the classrooms.

Apart from the teachers’ personal initiative, there are two scenarios that are not impossible. The first is that all degree programmes in the FL should incorporate a compulsory stay in a TL country. The second is that all permanent FL teachers in the system should receive a stipend and official assistance with visas, diplomacy matters, and so on, in order to travel to such countries every three to five years. The alternative to this would be enrolment in compulsory immersion programmes organized by

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the Ministry of Education during the vacation period. This would constitute part of on-going professional development.

With the careful and skilful implementation of clinical supervision in classrooms, schools have the capacity to diagnose their individual needs and put ameliorative measures in place. School policy can facilitate more intradepartmental planning and support through the allocation of time for meetings and the structured facilitation of collaborative work, thereby encouraging learning through sharing. Allied to this is the suggestion that teachers be given the opportunity to teach at varying levels of the school, so that the content of each level is mastered through preparation for classes.

If portfolios constituted an element of teachers' ongoing assessment or a part of a performance management system, teachers could record themselves with any form of technology available, for their personal listening, viewing, and self-critique. They would be required to develop a growth plan and path utilizing this self-improvement strategy. This kind of experience has proven to be very enlightening for practitioners.

Since experience has shown that there is a need for practising FL teachers in Trinidad and Tobago to enhance their skills in the TL, a professional training programme such as the Dip.Ed. may have a role to play in the development of teachers' linguistic proficiency. Teaching a FL requires that teachers be the total model. Since linguistic competence is essential to the FL teacher, there are two possibilities. One is that a language module be incorporated into the programme. The other is that there should be specialized preparation courses within the degree programme for those persons who read for a degree in a FL and want to become teachers. To this end, consultation between the Education and Foreign Language departments would be necessary.

The main thrust of this article has been to indicate that a high level of proficiency in the TL has an integral role to play in determining the professional standards of the FL teacher. While this perspective does not overlook the importance of pedagogical skills, it suggests that professional standards for FL teachers cannot discount the teacher's ability to use the language communicatively, inclusive of the varying types of competencies.

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