

SPEAK MY LANGUAGE

ASSESSING GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY IN MODERN LANGUAGES

Student Learning Outcomes

The Modern Language Department identified four learning goals for our graduates, which nicely overlap with the college-wide Six Student Learning Outcomes.

Currently, our primary focus is Goal #1, **Language Fluency**:

Graduates attain near-native fluency in the foreign language (in all four skills: speaking, listening, reading, writing) and possess the tools necessary to interact gracefully with those of other cultures. Our graduates also write well in the target language, expressing themselves not only with grammatical accuracy, but also with clarity and elegance. (cf. Standard 4: Written and Oral Communication)

Upon the recommendation of the PRC, and taking into account the new GE language requirement, for this review cycle we refined the focus to *grammatical knowledge/accuracy in writing (on exams, etc.) in lower-division language classes*, and defined benchmarks for each level.

QuickTime™ and a PDF viewer are needed to see this picture.

Assessment Strategy

Over a three-year period we attempted several assessment strategies, which we continually questioned and refined. Here we highlight the most effective:

Pre- & Post-test Comparison: Week 1 "mini-final" compared to same questions on final exam.

- In FR 2, students were tested in five major grammatical areas
- In SP 3, students were tested in six major grammatical areas

Benchmarks: A general rubric for all language courses was developed which differentiates between competency, proficiency, and mastery:

Competency (60%):

- Students will *reproduce* the grammatical structures (in speaking and writing) with at least 60% accuracy
- Students will *recognize* the grammatical structures (in listening and reading) at least 70% of the time

Proficiency (75%):

- Students will *reproduce* structures with at least 75% accuracy
- Students will *recognize* structures at least 80% of the time

Mastery (85%):

- Students will *reproduce* structures with at least 85% accuracy
- Students will *recognize* structures at least 90% of the time

Assessment Strategy

Specific benchmarks for each language course were defined, as in the example below:

French 2 Benchmarks

At the end of FR 2, 90% of students will be *competent* in the following areas (first presented in FR 2):

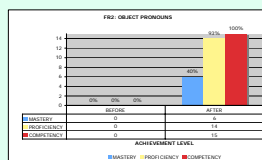
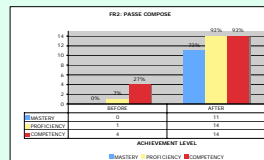
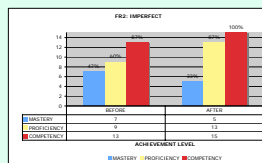
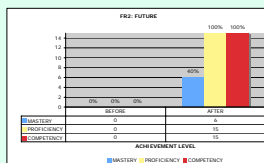
- Passé composé verb tense in all three regular conjugations & 24 irregular verbs
- Future tense in all three regular conjugations and 12 irregular verbs
- Indirect personal and impersonal pronouns, forms and word order
- 350 new vocabulary words

At the end of FR 2, 80% of students will be *proficient* in the following areas (first presented in FR 1):

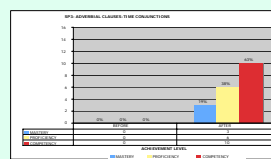
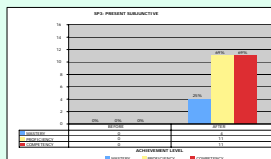
- Present tense of three regular conjugations (-er, -ir, -re)
- Present tense of 24 irregular verbs
- Imperfect tense of regular and irregular verbs
- Pronominal verbs, present and imperfect tenses
- Direct object pronouns, forms and word order
- Partitive and its pronoun, forms and word order
- Use of falloir/plaire/manquer/intéresser-type constructions
- 150 vocabulary words, building on recognition of 350 vocabulary words presented in French 1

Data and Results

Sample Summary of Results, FR 2:



Sample Summary of Results, SP 3:



Interpretation of Results

Department members met with an **outside consultant** and spent several hours discussing and interpreting the results, as well as examining the instrument itself. In general, we were extremely pleased with what we saw. In our discussions, we noted the following:

- ❖ Students in FR 2 & SP 3 (the test groups) were *placed* in the correct level: pre-test scores reveal that no students entering the course were competent in any of the major grammar areas (except the French imperfect tense, which they had already been exposed to in FR 1). Accurate placement of students was an added bonus of the assessment instrument.
- ❖ In FR 2, following the course, 100% of the students achieved competency in three of the five areas; 93% (all but 1 student) achieved competency in the passé composé; and 87% (all but 2 students) achieved competency in relative pronouns. In the imperfect, 87% of students achieved proficiency.
- ❖ The results reveal that students enter the course *unexposed* to the material, but by the end of the semester most students not only achieve competency but proficiency in all grammar areas. Many even reach mastery.
- ❖ In SP 3, the results were far less encouraging: although every student improved significantly and more than half the class achieved proficiency in all but one grammar area, we failed to meet our competency goal in five of the six areas tested (see Exhibit 1).
- ❖ After reviewing the Spanish results, we discovered that several changes could be made to the instrument itself to improve its efficacy (see Exhibit 1).

How We Changed

❖ As a result of our discussions, we discovered holes or gaps in our curriculum and therefore **redesigned the entire lower-division Spanish curriculum** (see Exhibit 1) in order to more equitably distribute the material and achieve greater student learning at all levels.

❖ Current, preliminary assessment results reveal greater competency across the curriculum as a result of these changes.

Next Steps

- ❖ Continue to use this assessment strategy in all language courses
- ❖ Solicit feedback from outside consultant & refine assessment tool
- ❖ Continue evaluating if curricular changes have been effective
- ❖ Discuss results with GE Committee
- ❖ Evaluate student work collected in Departmental Writing Portfolio (2007-08)
- ❖ Begin assessment of oral competency by videotaping oral presentations (2008-10)