

AUSÍN, ADOLFO
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
RUIZ-SÁNCHEZ, CARMEN
AQUINAS COLLEGE

ESCAPING THE LARGE LECTURE HALL: HOW TO TURN A LARGE ENROLLMENT THIRD-YEAR SPANISH GRAMMAR CLASS INTO A HYBRID / ONLINE CLASS

BIODATA

Dr. Adolfo Ausín got his BA in Spanish Philology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, and his MA and PhD in Linguistics at the University of Connecticut. Since 2002 he has been teaching upper level undergraduate and graduate classes on Spanish Linguistics at Michigan State University. Since 2007 he has been designing and teaching hybrid and fully online classes for the Spanish Department and for the Center of Integrated Studies in the Arts and Humanities. His research currently focuses on online teaching, Spanish syntax and Linguistic Theory. Right now he is part of the “Web 2.0 technology and instructed language acquisition” grant funded by the International Research and Studies Program.

Dr. Carmen Ruiz-Sánchez got her BA in English Philology at the University of Seville, Spain. She came to the United States to do her graduate studies. She completed her MA in Teaching English as a Second Language and her MA and Ph.D. in Hispanic Linguistics at Indiana University. Her areas of interest are Sociolinguistics, Second Language Acquisition and Spanish Phonology, and she has published a book and several articles in these areas. She teaches Spanish lower and upper level courses and coordinates the first-year Spanish program in the Department of World Languages at Aquinas College. Before joining the faculty at Aquinas College, she taught undergraduate and graduate courses in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Michigan State University.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este estudio es mostrar que un curso híbrido y/o completamente online puede ofrecer una alternativa eficaz para las clases con un alto número de estudiantes, para cursos de verano y/o para estudiantes no tradicionales. En nuestro caso, intentábamos escapar el formato de clase-conferencia y los desafíos que tal formato presenta como encontrar una manera de transmitir el material de clase a un número elevado de estudiante con éxito, mantener la interacción entre profesor-

estudiante y entre estudiante-estudiante, y promover el aprendizaje activo. Este artículo describe y explica los pasos para desarrollar y enseñar las versiones híbridas y online de una clase de gramática de español del tercer año. Para ello se emplearon múltiples recursos tecnológicos, como Adobe Presenter, para transformar las presentaciones de PowerPoint en Flash, CLEAR Conversation y Skype para hacer video-conferencias asincrónicas y sincrónicas, Googledocs para la tarea en grupo, y la plataforma de la universidad para las actividades de práctica y las pruebas online. El programa Jing también se usó para capturar la imagen de la pantalla y hacer tutorías. Este ensayo incluye información detallada para que se puedan crear cursos similares.

PALABRAS CLAVE: curso online, híbrido, clase-conferencia, enseñanza de gramática española, tecnología

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to show that a hybrid and/or a fully online course can be an effective alternative for large enrollment classes, summer courses, and/or for non-traditional students. In our situation, we were trying to escape the big lecture hall and the challenges that such a format presents, like finding a successful way to deliver the material to a large number of students, keeping teacher-student and student-to-student interaction, and promoting active learning. This article describes and explains the steps involved in developing and teaching a hybrid and a fully online versions of a third-year Spanish grammar class. Multiple technological resources are employed: Flash Learning objects, such as Adobe Presenter, to transform PowerPoint presentations into Flash, CLEAR Conversation and Skype to have asynchronous and synchronous video conferencing, Googledocs for group homework, and the university's Course Management System for practice activities and online quizzes, some of them including spoken language samples. The screen capture program (Jing) was also employed to create video tutorials. Detailed information is provided so that similar courses can be created.

KEY WORDS: fully-online, hybrid, large lectures, Spanish grammar teaching, technology

INTRODUCTION

Most of the research on online language learning has concentrated on demonstrating and discussing its effectiveness. These studies indicate both a lack of adverse effects on students' progress and a superior development of literacy skills from online language learning (Waschauer, 1996). More specifically, it has been found that students perform better in reading and writing (Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain, & Earnest-Youngs, 1999; Cahill & Catanzaro, 1997; Chenoweth & Murday, 2003), and in aural and oral communications (Nieves, 1996) than learners in traditional classes. Along this line of research, Chenoweth, Ushida & Murday (2006) investigated the effectiveness of online language courses at elementary and intermediate levels and their counterpart, conventional (offline) courses with respect to

oral and written production, reading and listening comprehension, grammar knowledge, and vocabulary. The results demonstrated that students' performance was largely comparable in the online and offline formats, with teachers reporting no differing abilities.

With regard to the benefits for the learner, it has been argued that computer-assisted language learning stimulates metalinguistic awareness, allows for self-directed and self-paced study (Arispe & Blake, 2012; Lee, 2005; Murray, 1999), and can accommodate different learning styles (Bowers, 2001; Bull, 1997; McGrath, 1998). Additionally, students tend to respond favorably to the online platform's flexibility and its potential self-directed learning (Arispe & Blake, 2012; Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain & Earnest-Youngs,

1999; Murray, 1999). Another potential benefit is opportunities for authentic communication and interaction (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000).

Studies specifically testing the efficacy of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) as a tool for grammar acquisition have shown mixed results. Blake (2000) and Pelletieri (2000) examined grammatical development in terms of negotiation of meaning, task type, and feedback. According to Pelletieri, SCMC cultivates negotiation of meaning and gives students time to think about the structure of the language, which has a significant role in the development of grammatical competence. Blake's results do not present the same pattern, as most negotiations were lexical. Lee (2002) found that the most common modification devices (help requests, clarification checks, and self-correction) were used to negotiate both meaning and form. However, she noticed that students tended to just use simple sentences, concluding that SCMC promotes fluency and not accuracy. Salaberry (2000), on the other hand, found that SCMC dialogues helped to develop greater morphosyntactic development of past tense forms in Spanish than face-to-face dialogues, and Blake & Delforge (2004) suggest that online courses may provide an effective format for foreign language instruction, being especially conducive to the development of grammatical competence and written expression.

Several researchers (Blake & Zyzik, 2003; Warschauer, 1997) have speculated about why online students demonstrate superior performance on grammar tests. Since the written language is the primary mode of instruction in online courses, it might promote increased metalinguistic awareness that is considered to be part of the crucial priming mechanism for language acquisition by interactionist researchers (Gass, 1997).

The purpose of this paper is to show that a hybrid and/or a fully online course can be an effective alternative for classes with large enrollments or with similar challenges such as finding a successful way to deliver the material to a large number of students, keeping a certain degree of teacher-student and student-to-student interaction, and ensuring active learning. This article describes and explains all the steps involved in developing and teaching a hybrid and a fully online version of a third-year Spanish grammar class. Detailed information is provided so that similar courses can be created.

The paper starts with a brief summary of the different ways in which this third-year Spanish grammar class has been taught at Michigan State University and the rationale for switching to hybrid and fully online formats. Next, both the hybrid and the fully online courses are carefully described. Then, students' perceptions of the course are discussed and their interaction with the online material is analyzed as a means of evaluation. The paper concludes with the challenges and limitations of both the hybrid and fully online courses, and the implications for similar courses.

A THIRD-YEAR SPANISH GRAMMAR CLASS

In many US universities there is a third-year Spanish grammar class that students take before continuing with more advanced classes. In some universities this grammar class has large enrollments with a big lecture session and smaller discussion / recitation sessions, like it is at Michigan State University. In the past, the main instructor, a full-time faculty member, would explain the grammar concepts on a lecture in a classroom with over 150 students. Students reviewed and practiced these concepts with teaching assistants or instructors

in smaller discussion sessions (30 students in each section) later in the week.

Teaching Spanish grammar in a big lecture hall was challenging. Previous faculty members implemented strategies to make their lectures more successful. For instance, in order to encourage attendance and more active student participation, one of the previous professors distributed an incomplete handout before class that students had to complete during class, as she was presenting the information. See Syzik (2008) for more details. In Spring 2008, one of the authors decided to explore a hybrid format to replace the large lecture. Below we explain the reasons for such a decision.

In general, both instructors and students seemed dissatisfied with the setting of a big lecture. To begin with, attendance was low, probably due to the lack of an attendance policy and to a clear lack of interest on the part of the students. Also, according to our direct experience with this course, many students did not see the value of just listening to a lecture on Spanish grammar without practice activities. They often assumed that they could obtain the same information in the smaller recitation classes. An important factor to keep in mind is that almost every student taking this course is used to learning Spanish in small groups, either in college or in high school, and receiving a lot of individual attention. This could also have contributed to the students' reluctance to attend the large lecture meetings.

Besides promoting absenteeism, the large classroom format offers minimal student-faculty interaction. Rather, it tends to be reduced to a unidirectional discourse presented by the instructor, in which personalized instruction is absent and no attention is paid to the individual needs of the students. Also, in a large classroom setting

there is little opportunity for active learning since the role of the student is limited to passively listening to what the instructor says. Another challenge faced when teaching this course in the big lecture setup is the pressure to cover all the planned content in 50 minutes. The time constraint of the big lecture design also prevents the professor from receiving immediate student feedback regarding their comprehension of the material.

There are also specific reasons to avoid the large lecture format that are related to the subject of the class (Spanish grammar) and its place in the curriculum. Being the first of the third-year courses and a prerequisite to all of the other upper-division courses at Michigan State University, students come from very different backgrounds and their level of Spanish varies. Most students come from 200-level university classes but other students come directly from high school, having tested in the course by the Placement Exam.

Finally, there are some native or heritage speakers that are placed in this class. This is particularly relevant with respect to their explicit knowledge of the Spanish grammar. Different instructors put different amounts of emphasis on the relevance of explicit grammar in basic-level language classes. Moreover, students' general metalinguistic knowledge, not just in Spanish but also in their native language, differ a lot and tend to be quite rudimentary.

Having all of this in mind, we looked for a more flexible alternative to the big lecture, an online lecture that could better accommodate students' particular situations. The goal of designing the online lecture was to make sure that every student could become familiar with the basic concepts of each lesson, so that they could participate in the review and practice activities in the face-to-face sessions. These are the designing principles that we followed:

- Online delivery of the lesson and its availability during an extended period of time to add flexibility.
- A lecture divided into smaller parts to make the lesson more manageable.
- Addition of interactive components to the lecture to ensure students taking an active role.
- Inclusion of feedback in the lecture to help students complete the lectures on their own.
- A lecture that would allow their progress to be tracked by the student and the instructor.

Based on all this, we created an online lecture with a series of interactive presentations followed by quizzes, used to check student's progress as well as to reinforce key concepts. The online lectures and the other components of the two versions of our Spanish grammar class are described next.

THE HYBRID GRAMMAR CLASS

During the academic year, this grammar course is offered in a hybrid format: the material is presented online and practice takes place in recitation sections. The course consists of five main components: the online lecture, face-to-face recitation sessions, homework, weekly online quizzes and two written exams.

THE ONLINE LECTURE

The online lecture is made up of a series of interwoven PowerPoint presentations and short quizzes that have to be taken in a certain order and before recitation classes meet. The PowerPoint

presentations are interactive: students are asked questions and need to do practice exercises within them, and include numerous examples, some graphics, pictures, and links to other resources. Grammar is often presented inductively by means of questions posed to the students. The selection of topics and the starting points for each lesson come from the textbook *Curso de gramática avanzada del español: Comunicación reflexiva* (Jordan & Pereiro-Otero, 2006), but additional information and clarifications have been added.

The quizzes in the online lessons are mainly multiple-choice and true/false exercises. They tend to have around 10 items, must be completed in 10-15 minutes, and can be taken an unlimited number of times. Students are not allowed to save their answers or leave the quiz and return to it later. Questions are randomly selected from a question bank to avoid repetition and memorization of previous questions. If a student does not earn a grade higher than 80% on a quiz, they do not pass and need to retake it. This means that they are instructed to watch the online lecture again before retaking the quiz. All of these measures are also intended to prevent students from working together or sharing answers.

With regard to the design of the lessons, every lesson consists of 4 to 5 PowerPoint presentations, and each presentation is followed by a quiz that tests the understanding of the content in the corresponding presentation. For example, Lesson 01, which is an introductory lesson about the class and grammatical terminology, is made up of a sequence of PowerPoint presentations and quizzes, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Partial screenshot of first lesson

Every presentation and quiz in a lesson folder is locked (see the lock icons in Figure 1) and protected with a password, except for the first presentation. Once the students open this first presentation, they will have access to the first quiz. If the students do not pass a quiz (80% or more), they will be directed to read the previous presentation again and will have to retake the quiz as many times as needed. When the student completes a quiz successfully, the next PowerPoint presentation becomes available and they can continue with the lesson. If the students try to skip a presentation or a quiz, they will be denied access. In this way, we make sure that students look at the material in the order that we have planned, as one would

do when teaching in a face-to-face environment. Students do not receive a grade for completing the online lesson and taking these short quizzes, but they need to complete the entire lesson before the deadline or they get penalized. In general, students complete the lesson in a timely manner and without much trouble. It is true, though, that some of the most difficult material may result in multiple quiz submissions by many students. On rare occasions, a student gets frustrated because they cannot pass a quiz to continue. When a student reports a problem, we access the CMS, look at the mistake/s the student keeps making and give them more feedback. After the deadline is met, all the presentations and quizzes are still available to the students. Because students are required to complete the online lecture before the recitation sessions meet, they tend to come to the recitation classes well-prepared.

We believe that an online format for the main lesson addresses and resolves many of the problems and challenges that were identified at the beginning of this paper. First, it forces the student not only to complete the lesson (they cannot be “absent”), but also to have an active role. Secondly, the delivery of the content is more personalized. In a large classroom setting that task of accommodating students’ individual needs becomes virtually impossible. In the current online format, the delivery of the content is directly linked to the progress the student is making since the availability of the different parts of a lesson is conditional on the successful completion of the previous items. Lastly, the professors’ stress and frustration originated from the need to cover the weekly material in a 50 minute-lecture are eliminated in an online format, which allows professors not only to provide students with all the necessary material but also to incorporate additional clarifications and resources.

The first time this class was offered in the hybrid mode, students were informed that it was a new format and that if it did not work out as expected we would go back to the traditional face-to-face large classroom setting. During the 4th week of class students were surveyed to see what they thought of this new format. The survey was anonymous and contained 5 statements with five Likert-type scale options (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) and an open question. Out of the 168 students who were enrolled in the class, 160 of them took the survey. The results of the five Likert-type questions are summarized in Table 1.

Questions	SA	A	U	D	SD
Q: I am satisfied with the way SPN310 has gone so far.	93	57	8	2	0
Q: The "Monday" lectures on ANGEL are useful and help me understand the material.	110	46	2	2	0
Q: I want to continue with the same format for the rest of the semester.	134	17	6	3	0
Q: I believe that attending a traditional classroom lecture on Mondays would be more beneficial and helpful.	3	5	30	79	43
Q: I want to change the current format of this class immediately.	1	4	5	50	100

Table 1. Results of the 4th week survey

It is obvious that an overwhelming majority of the students was satisfied with the online lectures and did not want to go back to the traditional face-to-face format. Some of them had complaints about specific details of the online component, such as deadlines and lack of feedback in the quizzes. Others explicitly praised some of the features of the online lectures such as the availability of materials and quizzes for studying. Overall, we considered that the student response was very positive and continued with the hybrid format.

During that same semester, a second survey was conducted during the 11th week. At this point the students had taken a midterm exam and they had a clearer picture of their performance in the class. The results of this survey were similar to the previous one, as can be seen in Table 2. Most students were still satisfied with the online format of the lecture and preferred this format to the alternative. The biggest difference was the number of students who took the survey: approximately 48%, as opposed to the 95% of the first survey. We attribute this decline in participation to the fact that nothing was at stake for the students at this point of the semester, whereas the results of the first survey were linked to the future development of the class.

Questions	SA	A	U	D	SD
Q: The Monday lectures on ANGEL are useful and help me understand the material.	30	43	6	0	0
Q: I believe that attending a classroom lecture with a 160+ students would be more beneficial than online lectures on ANGEL.	2	4	19	29	25

Table 2. Results of the 11th week survey

RECITATION SESSIONS AND CLASS ACTIVITIES

The recitation sessions are led by teaching assistants or instructors, and are mainly dedicated to practice the online materials. Direct references are made, when possible, to the online lesson so that the students can clearly see how they are interrelated.

Some of the class activities carried out during the recitation sessions come from the textbook *Curso de gramática avanzada del español: Comunicación reflexiva* (Isolde & Pereiro-Otero, 2006). The

professor selects and recommends some to the teaching assistants or instructors. The rest of the activities have been collected and designed by the different professors that have been in charge of the class since 2008, and range from fill-in the blanks (contextualized), production of sentences (contextualized), grammatical analysis (explaining grammaticality or ungrammaticality) and communicative exercises: discussion, problem-solving, and role-plays, among others.

Since this is a multi-section course and the practice undertaken in the recitation sessions depend on the online lecture, it is important that there is a clear coordination and relevant connection between the online material and the class activities. It is for this reason that the professor offers an initial workshop to familiarize the instructors with the format of the course, the CMS at Michigan State University, the material, and the activities. Teaching assistants are responsible not only for teaching the recitation sessions, but also for reviewing and understanding the online content, exams, quizzes and class activities. In addition to communicating with the teaching assistants and instructors via email and Skype, the professor meets with them once a week. In this weekly meeting the instructors let the professor know how the classes are going and ask questions about the material. Thus, the professor becomes aware of how students are doing in the recitation sessions and what challenges instructors are finding.

HOMEWORK

Homework assignments consist of 2 or 3 activities, created in a word document. They become available online on Tuesdays and are due in class on Fridays. Being available on Tuesdays allows students to

take a look at them before the Wednesday class in case they have questions for the instructors. The homework assignments are well coordinated with the rest of the course materials, being totally based on the online materials and classroom activities, and having a similar format.

WEEKLY LESSON QUIZ

There is a longer online quiz to be submitted once a week by the students. It follows the format of the quizzes within the lecture but covers the week's materials. For this quiz, students receive a grade that counts towards their final grade. These weekly quizzes have a time limit of 15-20 minutes. They become available after the deadline for the online lecture, on Wednesdays, and are due on Saturday or Sunday night, one or two days after the last recitation class of that week. Students are instructed to take it after the Friday class, once they have practiced the material extensively.

EXAMS

There are two multiple-choice exams: a midterm and a final exam. The midterm has only multiple-choice questions. The final exam has both multiple-choice and short essay questions, in which students have to explain some grammatical aspects of the Spanish language, comment on differences between English and Spanish or discuss some examples. The multiple-choice questions have the same format as the questions in the lesson and weekly quizzes. The essay questions have a format similar to some of the homework questions.

Weekly Organization

This course is highly structured and it is essential that students complete the different components of the course in a timely manner. We take several steps to help students meet the deadlines. First, we set our CMS's milestones for all the assignments in each week so that they appear in the course calendar and students can use the tasks / milestones feature on our CMS to see what they have to do and when. Second, the so called "agents" are used to send two types of automated emails to the students: announcements and reminders. The announcement emails let students know about the availability of a given assignment and the reminder emails remind students about forthcoming deadlines. In the case of the online lecture and weekly quiz, only those students who have not completed the assignment receive the reminder.

FULLY ONLINE VERSION

MOTIVATION

A fully online version of this grammar course was created in summer 2010. The initial motivation to develop this fully online course was to help with the high demand of students who are unable to register during the academic year. Moreover, offering this course online has many other advantages, already mentioned in the introduction, such as the more active role taken by students, the flexibility entailed in such format, the accommodation of students with different learning styles and backgrounds, and the availability of all the materials.

Additionally, a fully online course allows students to take the course anywhere, which is especially important in the summer since most

students are not on campus. Finally, the administration encourages faculty to develop online courses to be offered during the summer.

When designing the fully online version of the class, we had to find a way to replicate the face-to-face discussion. Thus, we created various online activities that would include the following:

- Repeated practice of the material.
- Student-teacher interaction.
- Student-student interaction.
- Speaking Spanish.

In order to facilitate repeated practice of the material, a practice folder was created in each unit with an average of 10 activities similar to the activities completed in the original face-to-face sessions. To replicate student-student interaction, the individual homework assignments were converted into group homework activities. Discussion forums were not used because, in our opinion, the subject matter (Spanish grammar) does not lend itself very well to open-ended discussion. Furthermore, it is easier to evaluate and set clear goals with group homework. To foster student-teacher interaction we used (a)synchronous videoconferencing. In the asynchronous version the instructor would record video questions and students would later record their video answers. In the synchronous version, the instructor would have weekly meetings with the students via Skype. Video conferencing not only facilitated student-instructor interaction but it also encouraged students to speak Spanish. Further exposure to spoken Spanish was attained

through the introduction of an audio component in some of the practice and homework exercises.

Two units are covered every week during the summer session. There are four main elements in each unit: lecture, practice activities, the group homework and assessment, which includes a unit quiz and a video question. The weekly organization appears illustrated in Figure 2, taken from the syllabus. A screenshot of a sample unit appears in Figure 3. Below, a more detailed description of all these different components is presented.

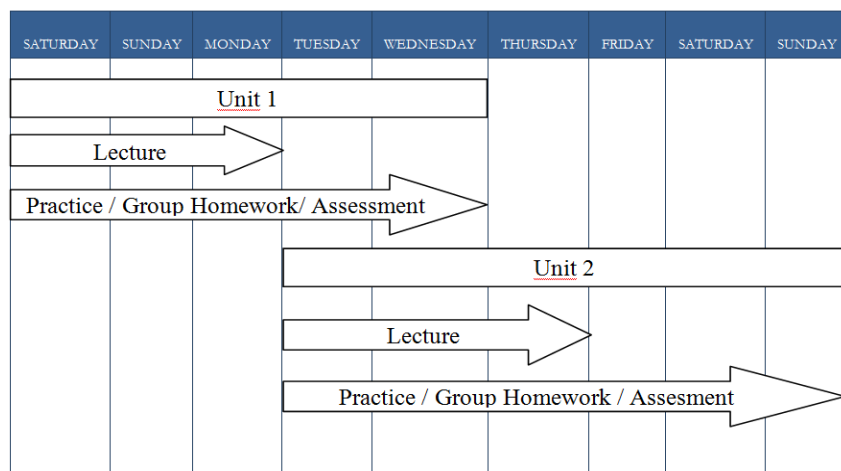


Figure 2. Weekly deadlines of all the components of the online class.

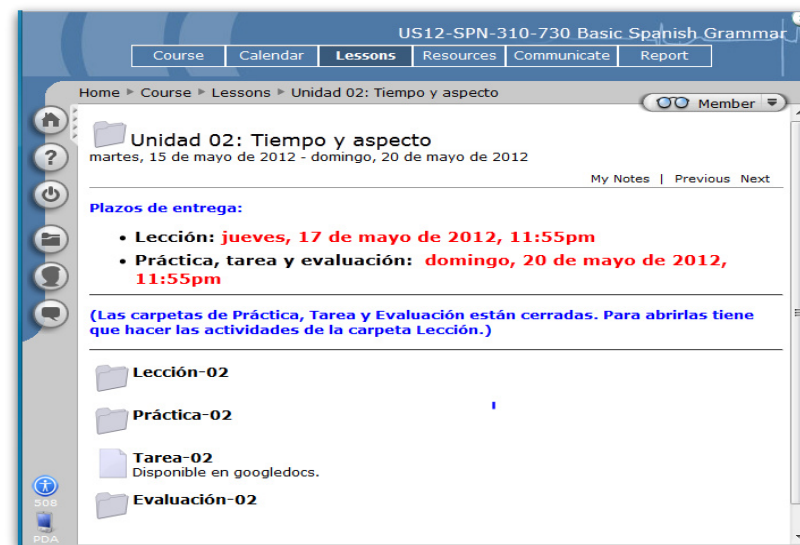


Figure 3. Unit screenshot

ONLINE LECTURE

The lectures in the fully online course and in the hybrid version are basically the same. Both of them currently use Adobe Presenter for the presentation of the material. Adobe Presenter creates Flash learning objects that can be playable on any browser and can only be seen as a slideshow, without the student having to click on the slideshow button, as with PowerPoint. This allows the instructor to better control how students see the presentations and make sure that they are involved in the interactions created throughout the presentations.

ONLINE PRACTICE

The online practice has the purpose of making up for the kind of practice students get in class, and it is, therefore, one of the most challenging components of the fully online course. These practice activities, created with the CMS, are varied and include spoken language samples and videos. All of these practices are machine-graded and allow for unlimited attempts. After the deadline, these activities are still available for additional practice and for preparation for exams. Many of the practice exercises were multiple-choice but other types of activities such as fill-in-the-blank, matching, and crossword puzzles were designed to mimic some of the in-class activities. The online activities relied mostly on written text but audio and videos were incorporated as much as possible. In what follows we illustrate some sample activities:

CROSSWORDS PUZZLES. A crossword puzzle on grammatical terms can be seen in Figure 4.

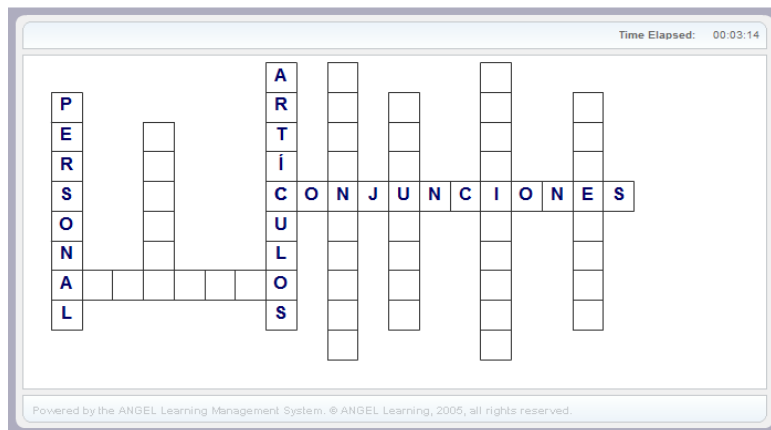


Figure 4. Practice activity: crossword puzzle.

CONTEXTUALIZED MULTIPLE-CHOICE EXERCISES WITH AUDIO. For example, a newspaper article had some words underlined and students had to identify their grammatical category. A recording of the text was included so students could also be exposed to oral Spanish.

CONTEXTUALIZED FILLING-IN-THE-BLANK EXERCISES. During the first days of the session, students were asked to complete a series of sentences according to the information presented in the syllabus.

AUDIO-ONLY MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS. For example, students listen to some sentences and they have to decide whether there is a verb in subjunctive form.

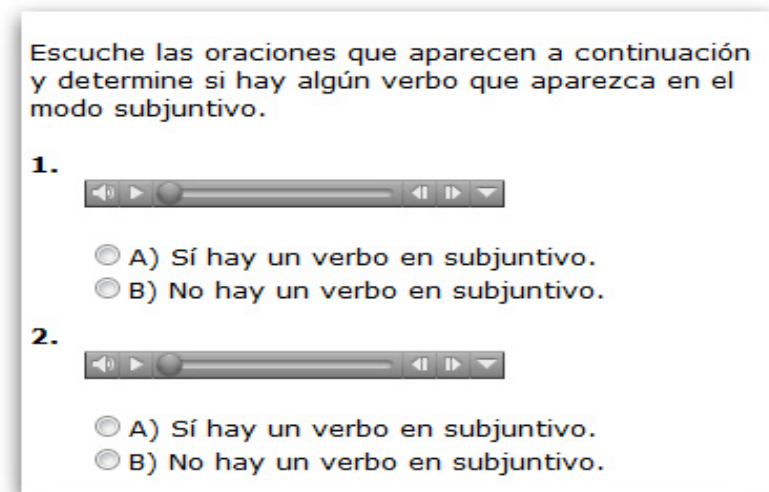


Figure 5. Practice activities: audio-only multiple choice questions.

CONTEXTUALIZED FILL-IN-THE-BLANK EXERCISES WITH VIDEO INPUT. A YouTube video is embedded in the activity and students are asked to complete sentences that describe the video.

SEQUENTIAL ACTIVITIES. For instance, the lesson about *ser* and *estar* includes one activity in which students have to choose between these two verbs, and a second activity in which students have to identify the reason for their choice. Students need to get at least 80% in the first activity before they can proceed to the next one.

In all the practice exercises students receive feedback after submitting their answers. They are always told the right and wrong answers, and occasionally they are given some additional explanation.

ONLINE UNIT QUIZZES

These quizzes are like the ones described above for the hybrid version. The only difference is that the fully online course, being a summer course, requires students to take two quizzes per week, since two units are covered weekly.

HOMEWORK WITH GOOGLEDPCS

Team homework is assigned for every lesson. Teams are randomly created by the professor and they normally consist of 4-6 students. This group homework is done on Googledocs at Michigan State University, recently renamed as Google Drive. This is the online word processor developed by Google that is part of the Google apps that Michigan State University students have access to through the university system.

Students have two tasks in each assignment: completing part of the homework assignment by a certain date, and making well-thought and relevant comments on their workmates' answers. Students receive two different grades: a content grade that reflects the overall quality of the homework and a participation grade that reflects each team member's contribution to the discussion.

VIDEO QUESTIONS

CLEAR Conversations application or Skype is used to execute asynchronous or synchronous video conferencing respectively, depending on the professor's preference. In either case, students are given some questions prompting the grammar structures studied in the lesson.

When using Conversations the instructor needs to set up an account, but the students do not. The instructor signs into Conversations, sets up the assignment (records the question(s), sets up the time limit...) and, after that, the html code can be copied and pasted onto any web page including the CMS. When students access that page, they only need to write their name, listen to the questions and then record their answers. To review students' recordings, the instructor signs into Conversation and accesses the students' submissions. The main advantage of Conversations is its convenience: students can submit their recordings whenever they want.

Another way to carry out these videoconferences is via Skype. The advantage of Skype is that the students and the professor can interact in real time. The main drawbacks are that it is more time-

consuming for the instructor and that it limits students' flexibility to complete the task. Students need to sign up for a day and time when they can meet the professor.

VIDEO TUTORIALS

As previously mentioned, the free screen capture program Jing was used to create video tutorials (<http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html>) to familiarize students with the format of the course, the CMS, the different components, and other resources employed such as Googledocs and Conversation. Additionally, video tutorials can be made to answer questions regarding technical difficulties. These tutorials are very easy to make and are highly recommended for illustration. All the video tutorials can be stored in Screencast for free (<http://www.techsmith.com/screencastcom.html>).

STUDENTS' REACTIONS

At the end of the two summer sessions in 2011, students completed an anonymous survey. A summary of their opinions is provided below.

Most students thought that the lessons were well-organized. They liked the sequential format, the thorough information and that it was easy to follow. A few students were overwhelmed by the deadlines and amount of material, however. With regard to the quality of the Adobe presentations in the online lessons, most students thought that the quality was good or even excellent. They mentioned how they could easily go back to find any information they needed and they also liked the interactive component, since they thought it reflected well common interactions during real class time. A couple of students stated that they would like to have an

audio component in these presentations, and only one said that he would have preferred PowerPoint presentations instead.

The use of Googledocs for the group homework received positive feedback. All students thought that it was easy to use and a good learning tool for work group in an online course. They explicitly mentioned the value of getting comments from their classmates and working with them. Nonetheless, there were some complaints about the work habits of their workmates and the deadlines. They complained about having to comment on easy tasks or having to reply to those who posted really late.

As far as the format and technical aspects of the quizzes and exams, all students thought they were good or fine. They particularly liked the multiple-choice format and never encountered technical difficulties. They found them clear and easy to submit. A few thought that the wording of the questions was misleading, even though the language used in the quizzes is similar to the one in the lessons.

During the first summer session, the practice activities were set so that the CMS would choose the highest grade. Most students agreed that the practice exercises were helpful in understanding the material and a few of them stressed that they learned the most from doing these practices. They also mentioned that doing these exercises was similar to being in class working on a workbook. For the second summer session, the settings of the practice exercises were set to calculate the average grade. There was no agreement. Two students said that the exercises were helpful, two were not sure, one said that they helped them a bit, and one did not use these exercises at all. Some students suggested not to use the average grading method or at least have some other way to practice without

their grades being affected. With respect to the format of the practice, students liked the variety of activities. They liked that listening and reading exercises were included as well. The one that was most disliked was the long paragraphs due to their difficulty and inconvenience to redo again and again. There was also a complaint about the automated grading being too picky. This is a common complaint with online homework as students tend to misspell words or forget accent marks.

Most students stated that the video questions using CLEAR Conversation application did not really help them understand the material and one student found the exercise awkward. Students who did this component of the course using Skype liked it a little bit better as they could receive immediate feedback from their professor and additional explanations. For them this was a more natural way to interact.

When asked about possible changes for the online course, most students thought the material was too comprehensive for a seven-week period. Some of the students who work full-time would have preferred fewer deadlines and different times. A few of them, however, understood that this is an intensive summer course and that it demands a serious commitment. They would also like to have lectures available along with the PowerPoint presentations and/or add an audio component to them.

As for the most useful part of the course, responses varied. Students pointed out that because of the way the course was set up, it was possible to learn much about Spanish grammar. They stressed that having the lessons split up and extensive practice was very beneficial. They found that the quizzes after the lessons were an adequate tool to identify where to focus their studies. One of the

main benefits pointed out by students was the flexibility and opportunity to learn at their own pace. As for the email reminders, they tend to agree that they are annoying but helpful at the same time.

STUDENTS' INTERACTION WITH THE ONLINE MATERIAL

An important step in developing a new class is to assess its efficiency. Since we could not compare the new and the old format, we decided to look at the way students interacted with the online lesson with the purpose of finding correlations students' behavior and their performance in the multiple choice section of the final exam.

To collect the data about students' behavior on one unit we downloaded all the submission data for the six quizzes in the online lesson for all the 125 students that were taking the class that semester. Remember that each online lesson contained a series of presentations each followed by a quiz that students need to successfully complete in order to proceed with the rest of the lesson. We combined the data (2092 attempts) into a single spreadsheet and we also recorded the scores on the final exam. Using the final exam score, we identified two groups: students scoring in the top 20% and those scoring in the bottom 20%.

DATA ANALYSIS

In general the data show that the goals that we had in mind when designing the online lessons were achieved. The main reason to develop an online lesson and to escape the large lecture was to offer

the students flexibility and personalized instruction. Table 3 reveals when the students completed the online lesson. As previously mentioned, each lesson becomes available for the students on Sunday at 12:05am and the deadline to complete it is Wednesday at 7:00am.

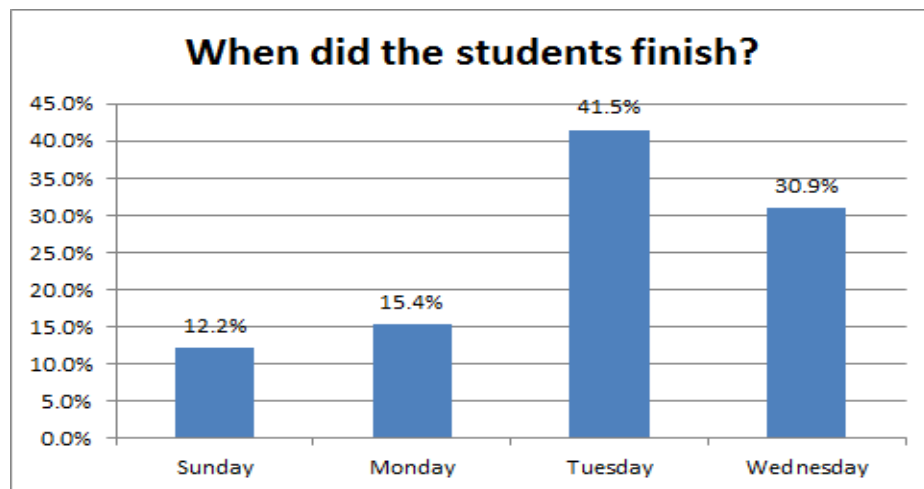


Table 3. Times when students finished the lecture.

As can be seen in Table 3 students took advantage of the flexibility of the online lectures. Instead of going to class at a specific time, students completed the lesson at the moment that was most convenient for them. Most of them (72%) waited until the last days (Tuesday and early Wednesday morning), but also a fourth of the students decided to complete it early (Sunday or Monday).

Similar results can be observed when we consider when the quizzes were taken as illustrated on Table 4.

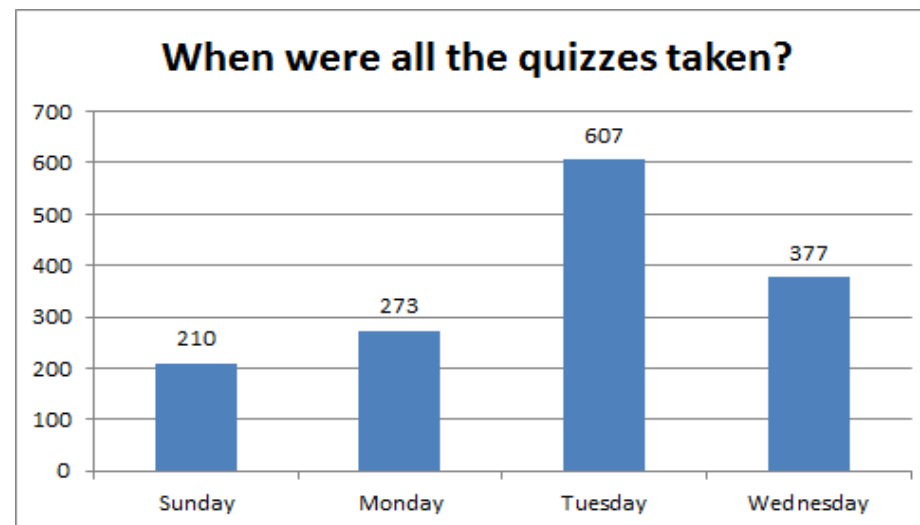


Table 4. Times when students submitted the quizzes.

Now let's turn to the issue of providing a personalized environment. When we designed the online lessons our goal was to achieve individualized delivery: we wanted the students who were more unfamiliar with the material to do more activities and therefore to spend more time with the online lesson. In order to determine if the design of the online lesson was successful in providing an individualized delivery we compared how different types of students interacted with the material. Using the multiple-choice section of the final exam we identified the top 20% students and the bottom 20%. As the data below show, the top 20% and the bottom 20% interacted with the material in very different ways both in terms of the number of quiz attempts to complete the lesson and in the amount of time it took them.

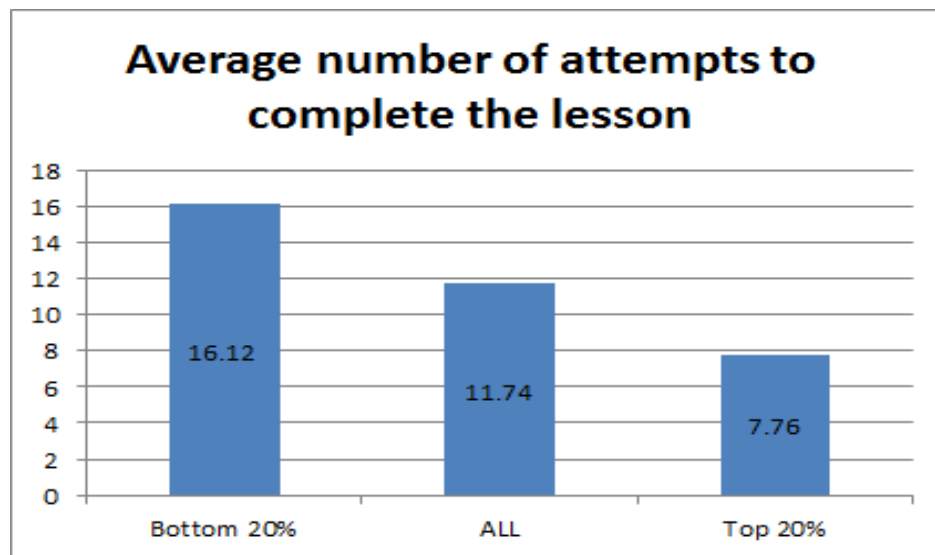


Table 5. Average number of attempts to complete the lesson.

This table shows the number of quiz attempts that students took to complete the online lesson. This lesson contained 6 presentations and 6 quizzes. Thus, the minimum number of quiz attempts to complete the lesson is 6. In other words, if there was a student who was able to get a passing score (80%) on their first and only attempt in every quiz, that student needed 6 attempts to complete the lesson. As can be seen on the table above, on average students required 12 attempts (11.74) to complete the lesson, that is, on average they had to take each quiz twice before they could proceed to the next part of the lesson. Interestingly, there is a clear difference in the number of attempts between students at the top and bottom 20%. Whereas the top 20% required approximately 8 attempts to complete the lesson, the bottom 20% required approximately 16 attempts.

Similar results can be observed when we measure the time elapsed between the moment they take the first quiz and the moment they successfully complete the last one. Although students can (and usually do) take a break between different parts of the lesson or start on one day and finish the following, we believe it is an accurate indication of the time they spend on the lesson. Table 6 shows the median values for the bottom 20%, for all the students and for the bottom 20%. We used the median (instead of the average) value to avoid the distortion generated by those students who took very long breaks or started one day and finished the following.

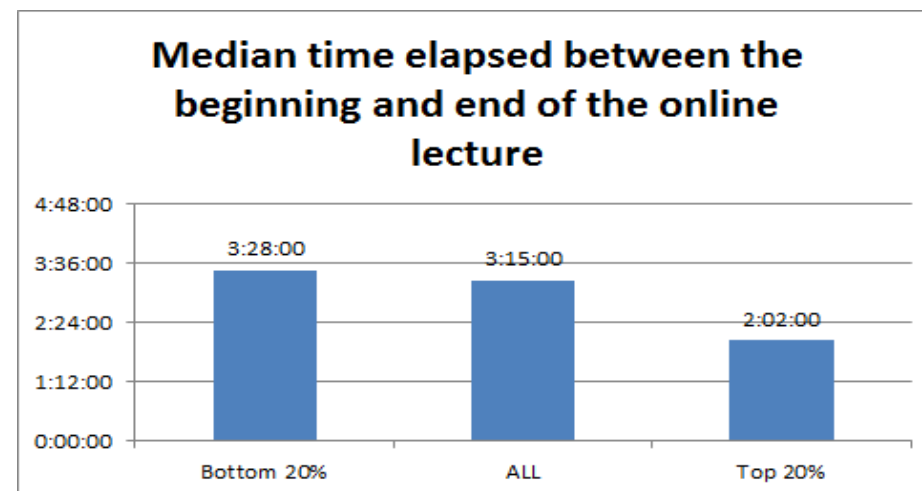


Table 6. Median time elapsed between the beginning and the end of the online lecture.

The table above shows that the median elapsed time for the bottom 20% (3h28m) was 70% higher than for the top 20% (2h02m). In other words, the way the lesson is designed makes the students who are less familiar with the material to spend more time on the lesson.

This is a clear advantage over the large lecture hall where all the students are exposed to the lecture for the same amount of time.

Finally, an additional advantage of delivering materials online is that the materials stay available online after the deadline and students can revisit them to get extra practice. In the semester under study, out of the 125 students who completed the lesson and the final exam, 45 went back to the online lesson folder and took some quizzes for extra practice. We compared the performance of those students in the multiple section of the final exam with the rest. Table 7 shows the results.

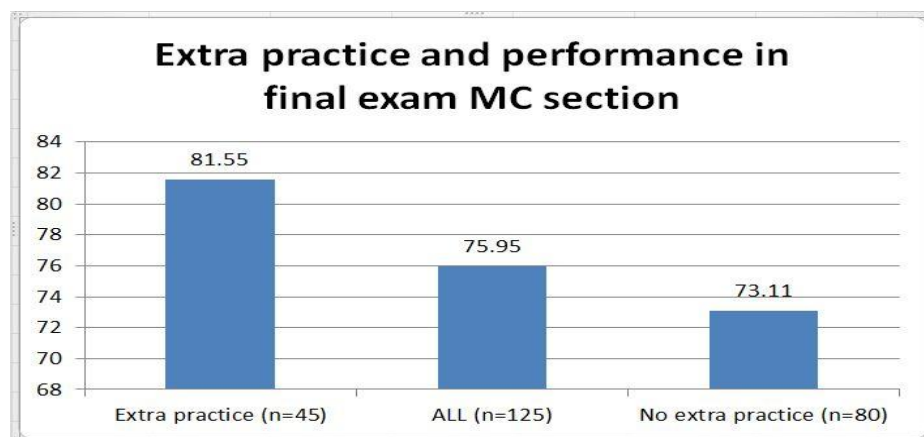


Table 7. Extra practice and performance in the final exam.

As can be seen in the table above, students who took the quizzes after the unit deadline for extra practice obtained on average 81.55 percent correct answers in the multiple-choice section of the final exam, whereas those who did not take the quizzes again obtained 73.11% of correct answers on average. That is, those with extra practice performed 12% better than those without it. We take the

correlation between extra practice and better performance (which may or may not be a cause and effect relation) as an indication of the advantages and benefits of posting the lessons online and making them continuously available for the students.

Overall, the data analyzed in this section confirm that students take advantage of the flexibility of online delivery and more importantly, that online tools allow the instructor to personalize the way different students interact with the material: those students who are more familiar with the material go through it faster than those who are not. Finally, online delivery allows easy access for extra practice to those students who may want it or need it.

CONCLUSIONS, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTION

We have been teaching the hybrid and the fully online courses for five years now and, even though we keep finding ways to improve them, we feel satisfied with both formats. The main purpose of this paper was to share the design and materials used for both setups so that similar courses can be developed. It was not our intention to argue that online teaching is superior to other modes of teaching, but we hope to have shown that online teaching can be an effective tool to solve some challenges encountered when teaching large courses face-to-face or that it can be simply used to reach more students, especially when offering courses in the summer or teaching to non-traditional students. In our particular situation, we were trying to escape the big lecture hall, as we did not find that teaching Spanish grammar to such a large group of students was pedagogically adequate. In addition, the idea of offering the course fully online was also motivated by the high demand of students and administrative pressure.

Both formats have shown positive results. Even though we do not think there has been a significant change in grades with respect to previous years, we have indeed noticed improvement in students' preparation for the recitation classes and in their general attitude towards the class, as evidenced in their course evaluations and online surveys. However, there is still room for improvement. The weakest students tend to struggle with the course, especially in the summer, so we need to find better ways to accommodate them. The summer course makes it especially challenging in regard of the quantity of material covered in 7 weeks and the lack of time for review sessions.

Currently, we are in the process of developing new items to be incorporated in future versions of the class, such as adding narration to the presentations, including narrated videos for feedback using the Kahn Academy format (<http://www.khanacademy.org/>), and designing warm-up activities using Flash objects and/or PowerPoint presentations.

Finally, this paper adds to the previous literature on the use of technology in the classroom, as it provides information about innovative tools to develop technology-based materials for foreign language teaching. In particular, it shows how a traditional class can be turned into a hybrid or fully online course. Same or similar designs to the ones presented here can be produced for other language classes.

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