A STUDY ON THE COGNITION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN ARGENTINA

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▪ ABSTRACT: In this article we discuss how the field of research called Teacher Cognition can contribute to our understanding of the role of the language teacher in the classroom and at the same time help to qualify teacher training, providing reflection tools. We present some results taken from a case study based on a one-day seminar in which a group of Argentine foreign language teachers, both in service and in training, had the opportunity to get in touch with this area of study and reflect and discuss their knowledge, beliefs and feelings from a series of individual and group exercises. Our analysis gives an account of the opinions and reflections that arose in the answers to the exercises and in the group discussions that were generated during the day, since these reflect the aspects of foreign language learning and teaching that are most crucial for these teachers. In addition, we make a detailed presentation of the structure of the seminar, since our intention is to propose the benefits of including a focus on teacher cognition in training and improvement courses for language teachers.

▪ KEYWORDS: teacher cognition; foreign language learning and teaching; teacher training; reflection exercises.

Introduction

The research field on teacher cognition, known as *teacher cognition studies,* dates back to more than 30 years and has its origin in cognitive psychology. In the last 15 years there has been a growing interest in studying foreign language teachers' cognition, particularly due to the pioneering work by Simon Borg (e.g. 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2015).

The purpose of this area of research is to understand the inner life of foreign language teachers, that is, their thoughts, beliefs, knowledge and feelings related to the subject they teach and how these factors influence their professional identity

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and their teaching practice in the classroom. The field also examines the sources of these thoughts and beliefs and how they are affected and shaped by teacher training and development courses, as well as other contextual factors (BORG, 2003). Studies indicate that an understanding of teachers' inner life can shed light on what goes on in the classroom and on how language courses are implemented, but it can also benefit teachers themselves, as they can reach a better self-understanding, if this is facilitated through reflection exercises and opportunities for discussion and experience-sharing with colleagues and experts.

In this article we present results from a case study based on a one-day seminar in which a group of Argentine foreign language teachers, both in service and in training, were introduced to this area of study and had the opportunity to reflect and discuss their knowledge, beliefs and feelings through a series of individual and group exercises. In our analysis, we will focus on the themes that emerged in the answers to the exercises and in the group discussions that were facilitated during the day. These reflect the aspects of foreign language learning and teaching that occupy and concern these teachers the most. In addition, we will describe in some detail the structure of the seminar, as we advocate the benefits of including a focus on teacher cognition and reflection exercises in refresher courses, and in general in situations where teachers have the opportunity to meet and exchange opinions (for example, in pedagogical meetings in schools/language schools, where teachers from the same area work collaboratively).

The field of research on teacher cognition

Borg (2003, p. 81) defined the concept of *teacher cognition* as "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe and think". The interest in teachers' thoughts arose around the 1970s, alongside the increasing understanding of the fundamental role that teachers play in the classroom and in students' learning processes (HATTIE, 2003). From that moment on, the idea that teachers limit themselves to mechanically implementing a pre-established recipe for teaching was abandoned and a better understanding was reached that teachers, in fact, constantly make crucial decisions in the classroom and that they design, implement and evaluate their own practice in iterative cycles. The nowadays widely disseminated concept of the teacher as a "reflective practitioner" (SCHÖN, 1983) encompasses this vision.

One of the results of this field of study is that teachers' beliefs are usually organized hierarchically, with both long-standing and deeply rooted beliefs and newer, peripheral and malleable ones. The most ingrained ideas are usually related to general pedagogical issues, such as teacher/student relationship or student motivation (PHIPPS; BORG, 2009; DARYAI-HANSEN; HENRIKSEN, 2017). In some cases, there may be contradictions between different beliefs and then the most deeply rooted will be the ones that prevail over the others. Vijayavarathan (2017) found an example of such contradictions in English teachers from the Faroe Islands, for whom their conviction that it is beneficial

for learning to correct mistakes is outweighed by their even deeper belief that it is important to take care of the emotional state of students. This makes them decide not to correct errors in oral communication to avoid creating anxiety states in the students.

An interesting result from teacher cognition studies is the discovery that the most ingrained beliefs come from a very early stage in teachers' development and in many cases go back to teachers' own experiences as learners, particularly as foreign language learners. LORTIE (1975, p. 67) named this phenomenon *apprenticeship of observation*. This apprenticeship of observation can be claimed to establish a solid basis for teachers' conceptualization of what it means to learn and teach a foreign language. Models of how to teach acquired in this way carry great weight in the initial stages of the professional career but can continue to exert influence throughout a teacher's whole professional life (BORG, 2015).

Borg (2015) explains that teacher cognition is complex, dynamic, and often unconscious. Teacher cognition is complex not only because there may be internal contradictions, but also because it is made up of many aspects and layers of knowledge, feelings, and experiences. It is dynamic because it is in constant development, both through education and training courses, which provide new knowledge and ideas, and through the teaching experience itself, which generates new discoveries. And it is unconscious in the sense that the teacher is often unaware of what lies behind their own ideas and concrete practice, built on a foundation that is slowly shaped over a long period of time.

To illustrate the complexity of the area, it is worth showing as an example the large amount of different types of knowledge that the teacher possesses, from the broadest, which includes knowledge of the society in which they work and of intercultural relations at the local and international level, through the most specific knowledge of their educational context (national educational system as well as the school or institute in which they work), through the different types of pedagogical knowledge (general and specific to the area of languages), to their knowledge of the language and culture in question (their own ability to express themselves orally and in writing in the language and their knowledge of the history and culture of the area of influence of the language they teach). In addition to this, we also need to consider the different layers that make up the beliefs, thoughts and feelings that the teacher accumulates throughout their professional life.

Studies on teacher cognition have shown that the varying degrees to which teachers feel confident in their own knowledge have a large impact on decisions made in the classroom. This, in turn, generates a feeling, known as *self-efficacy* (BANDURA, 1994), that several studies find decisive when explaining classroom practices. These feelings can be taboo, generate frustrations and create feelings of insecurity for the teacher who doubts their own abilities. For example, some studies on teacher cognition and grammar have shown that teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy regarding gramatical knowledge are less likely to address grammar in the classroom and answer questions from their students (BORG, 2015). In other cases, a feeling of low self-efficacy in

relation to oral ability makes teachers less likely to speak the foreign language in the classroom (VIJAYAVARATHAN, 2017).

Research methods used in teacher cognition studies and their pedagogical application

The complexity of this area of knowledge makes it complex to investigate it, and different methods are required to be able to approach it from its various angles. In the many studies already conducted in the area, both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used, as well as a combination of both. Data collection instruments such as questionnaires and tests can be used to collect quantitative data from a large number of teachers at the same time, while instruments such as interviews -both individual or in groups-, diaries, autobiographies, reflection essays, concept maps, metaphor selections and even drawings can provide qualitative data that allow the researcher to explore the issue in greater depth. Both types of instruments can be combined with classroom observations, so that espoused beliefs can be compared with classroom activity. At the same time, these same instruments that are normally used for research can in turn be used as instruments of reflection for teachers, both in training and in service. In this way, they become pedagogical activities for teacher training with the potential to generate a greater self-understanding in teachers and teacher students, as they can help them become aware of those facets of their inner life that exert a great influence on their professional identity and their pedagogical decisions in the classroom (HENRIKSEN *et al.*, 2020).

In Henriksen *et al*. (2020) cited above, the authors propose six central reflection questions for the teacher:

1) About knowledge – "what knowledge do I have?"
2) About beliefs – "what do I believe in?"
3) About feelings – "what feelings do I have?"
4) About practice – "what do I do?"
5) About gained experience – "what seems to work right or wrong?"
6) About innovation – "where do I want to go and what are the challenges?"

The idea advanced by these authors and by the present article is that the opportunity to reflect on the interaction between knowledge, practical experience and feelings and thoughts can provide great benefits to teachers, whether they reflect alone or in collaboration with their colleagues.

Teachers are often surrounded by demands that come from the environment (for example, new ministerial curricula, new teaching materials, requirements imposed by school authorities, etc.) and, at the same time, they often suffer from a lack of time and resources to implement the pedagogy they consider ideal. Reflection and exchange of

ideas with peers can contribute to a positive development of the teacher and to their professional well-being, and, for this, tools for reflection and suitable exercises are needed. In the section that describes the seminar that forms the empirical basis of this article, we will present an example of how to do it.

Teacher cognition on different aspects of language teaching

In the language teacher cognition research field, there have been studies that approached the subject from a general perspective, for example, studies that focus on elucidating the beliefs of teachers in training or the differences between experienced and new teachers (for example, COTA GRIJALVA; RUIZ-ESPARZA BARAJAS, 2013; ORMEÑO; ROSAS, 2015), and others where the attention falls on some particular aspect of language teaching and learning. Many studies, for example, have investigated teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching (for example, BORG, 1998a, 1998b, 2001; BORG; BURNS, 2008; PHIPPS; BORG, 2009; NISHIMURO; BORG, 2013; GRAUS; COPPEN, 2016). This is not surprising given the enormous attention that grammar teaching has received in the literature on language pedagogy in general. Other areas that have received attention, albeit on a lesser scale, are reading/writing (for example, GRADEN, 1996; MEIJER; VERLOOP; BEIJAARD, 1999; KUZBORSKA, 2011) and intercultural competence (for example, YOUNG; SACHDEV, 2011; XIAOHUI; LI, 2011), to name but a few.

In the present study, as will be seen in the section on results, the teachers who participated in the seminar reflected on both general topics and specific aspects of teaching and learning foreign languages.

Teacher cognition seminar

The seminar that constitutes the empirical basis of this article was conducted in the city of Rosario, Argentina, in 2018[1]. It was a free offer for in-service and pre-service foreign language teachers, for language teacher trainers and for other professionals (e.g. translators) interested in foreign language teaching and learning, in both formal and informal teaching contexts.

The main objective of the course was to introduce the attendees to the area of language teacher cognition research in order to present its importance for teacher training and practice. Through participation in the course, attendees obtained:

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[1] The first author of the article was in charge of the planning and delivery of the course, and the second, of the practical organization.

- Knowledge of the area of language teacher cognition research and of the main international results within a series of specific areas of language learning
- An understanding of their own knowledge and beliefs that influence their teaching practice and contribute to shaping their identity as teachers
- Analysis and reflection tools that would allow them to continue working on their own pedagogical development in an independent manner
- Ideas and tools to include this area of knowledge in the training of both in-service and pre-service teachers
- Research methods and tools that would allow them to develop research work in the area, including action research based on their own practice

The seminar was divided into two sessions or modules, separated by lunch. The modality of the seminar alternated between talks or presentations by the teacher in charge and different forms of practical, group or individual, work. During the course, several short readings and materials were handed out to the attendees, so that hey could use them to continue working on the subject on their own. All participants received a handout with a number of reflection exercises, and they all took their own responses home in order to continue reflecting on the ideas that emerged during the seminar and their own discoveries. Allowing the attendees to take the exercises used in class with them was part of the seminar's intention to provide materials that could be shared with colleagues and used in pedagogical development meetings or similar, to continue with the self-probing work in the company of peers.

The contents of the seminar were structured in two modules, the first one dedicated to presenting the research area of teacher cognition and reflecting on the foreign language teachers' professional identity, and the second one focusing on particular aspects of language teaching (teaching communication skills, grammar, oral skills, reading/writing and intercultural competence).

The exercises used in the seminar

As already mentioned, all participants received an 11-page long booklet with exercises and activities[2]. The material begins with questions regarding demographics (to be detailed later), including qualifications, teaching experience and own experiences with language learning. This is followed by an exercise based on Lightbown and Spada (2011) on language learning and on language teachers. It consists of a series of 18 statements accompanied by a Likert scale to express degree of agreement/disagreement at five levels. The exercise was completed individually, but an amount of time was allocated during the course for the oral exchange of answers (this exchange was recorded

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[2]   The complete booklet with reflection exercises can be required from the authors.

and transcribed - see also below). The third section of the material reveals reflections on learning and teaching from three open questions accompanied by guiding questions: the first one, a self-reflection on positive and negative experiences in learning new languages, and the second and third on hypothetical situations: "if you were to learn a new language...", and "if you wanted to teach someone your native language...". The next section addresses pedagogical innovation, allowing participants to reflect on the factors that hinder changes in teaching. These are provided a priori and the respondents must weigh their importance by proposing an order from the weakest to the strongest. Although it is a closed exercise, a final question allows for the addition of factors that have not previously been mentioned. The booklet continues with an exercise that focuses on the identity of the foreign language teacher, to be expressed through a metaphor and its explanation. Examples are provided and attendees are invited to discuss their proposed metaphors. The work with metaphors continues, immediately afterwards, with a reflection on the metaphors that best represent the language learner. Unlike the previous exercise, a list of metaphors is provided and the activity consists of choosing the most appropriate one and justifying the election.

The exercises named so far all share their general focus on learning, learners and teachers. The last two exercises focus on two crucial aspects of foreign language teaching and learning: grammar and intercultural competence, respectively. Beliefs about the teaching of grammar and its role in second language acquisition are explored through the elaboration of concept maps. Finally, two questionnaires about intercultural competence are included: one collecting the degree of agreement about various ideas associated with this dimension of the foreign language classroom, and the other, inquiring into the degree of importance assigned to certain aspects of intercultural competence as a goal in foreign language classrooms. Both questionnaires are presented in the form of a table with answer options expressing range of agreement and assessment of importance, respectively.

As already mentioned, the purpose of the seminar and the proposed exercises was to give the participating teachers the possibility of exploring their own thoughts and beliefs about different aspects of their profession as a way to achieve greater self-understanding and awareness of their professional identity. A secondary objective was to collect the responses and reflections obtained in order to better understand the participants' cognition and identify points of encounter and disagreement in their knowledge, thoughts and professional language. This second objective is the one we develop in the following sections.

Empirical analysis

In this section of the article, we present a quantitative-qualitative analysis of some of the results obtained in the Rosario seminar. We start with a description of the

participants and of the data- collection tools and the method of analysis, and then we address the analysis itself.

The participants

The empirical basis of this study consists of the production of eleven Argentinian foreign language teachers (English and Portuguese) who participated in the 6-hour seminar. All the participants signed a data-collection consent, so that their answers to the exercises, transcripts of group discussions and evaluation of the course could be used in an anonymized manner. Of the twelve participants, all female, eleven are teachers of English and one of Portuguese, a distribution that is representative of the languages taught in the country (English, as the foreign language par excellence, and Portuguese, taught to a lesser degree than English but having displaced French as the second most taught foreign language) and the respective number of teachers at national level, as well as the gender issue (the field of language teaching in Argentina is still dominated by the female gender). Of the ten participants with English as their target language, all have a teacher's degree, except for two who are translators, one of whom was studying to become a teacher at the time of the seminar. All are teachers in service, except this last one. This variety is also illustrative of the teaching sector in the country, in which the majority of those who work in language teaching have a teaching degree. However, the group is heterogeneous in terms of trajectory: while four participants have less than ten years of teaching experience (two of them only two years), two have between ten and twenty (12 and 18, respectively), one, has twenty and three, thirty. They all self-report a native speaker proficiency in Spanish and a very good, although not perfect, proficiency in the language they teach (except the teacher-in-training, who declares native-speaker proficiency in English). Finally, it is interesting to add that four teachers declare that they also know other foreign languages: Italian, Portuguese and English. This ability contrasts with that of other sectors of teaching in Argentina, where knowledge of other languages is almost non-existent.

Data collection tools and methods of analysis

The data collection was structured around the written responses to the exercises included in the booklet, together with the recordings (and subsequent transcripts) of the oral group discussions of said exercises. The written responses were collected at the end of the seminar, photocopied and returned to the participants, so that they could take the exercise booklet with them. Regarding the recordings, for technical reasons only two were retrieved. These are recordings made by two groups (of five and seven members, respectively) of their discussion sessions where responses to the exercise

based on Lightbown and Spada (2011) were shared. In the analysis, it is always indicated from group the quotations belong to (group 1 or group 2).

In this article, we focus on the analysis of the first questionnaire and the group exchanges on these responses. The procedure for data analysis consisted of a thematic and content analysis (DÖRNYEI, 2007). The material was read repeatedly to find relevant topics and categories to answer the goals of the study. We include a quantitative analysis of the closed questions to see the general degree of consensus among these teachers on central topics of foreign language learning and teaching, but, above all, we reproduce extensive literal examples of the exchanges of opinions collected, so that the qualitative analysis is as rich and comprehensive as possible. In this sense, we consider that it is not enough to summarize the participants' opinions with the words of the researchers, but rather that it is interesting to present the very language that the teachers use when expressing themselves on central aspects of their profession.

Some results

In this section we present the results corresponding to the ideas about language learning and about language teachers expressed by the participants through their responses and reflections. These results are of interest in a double sense: to know the teachers' ideas about crucial topics in foreign language teaching, and to attend to the degree of consensus in their ideas.

Regarding the latter, a general look at the responses of the closed questionnaire shows that the degree of consensus is not high among the participants, since in at least 8 out of the 18 statements the respondents make use of 4 or 5 response options, which indicates a high degree of diversity (see table 1). In 7 statements we find responses located in the two opposite extremes (options 1 and 5). This diversity and high degree of disagreement may be due to the fact that the group is not homogeneous, since, as we said before, there are great differences in the degree of experience of the participants, among which there are teachers with many years of teaching experience and others in training or just beginning their teaching profession. In studies with more homogeneous groups, the consensus may be greater. Another fact that is striking when observing the responses is that they do not focus on the "most neutral" options of the center (option 3 in particular), which has been found in previous studies and may be an indication of insecurity, for example in the case of teacher students (COTA GRIJALVA; RUIZ-ESPARZA BARAJAS, 2013). In the present study, on the contrary, it is option 1, which indicates a high degree of agreement, the most chosen. The option expressing the greatest disagreement (5) is chosen on numerous occasions (in 9 statements). These very categorical responses of agreement or disagreement are perhaps due to idiosyncratic traits that may vary in different cultural groups, but this is only a conjecture. Be that as it may, it is necessary to qualify these closed answers with the reflections that arise from the group discussions, since in some cases they contribute to clarify the

respondents' positions and explain divergences due to different ways of understanding the statements. Below, we take a closer look at the various statements and include both closed responses and oral comments.

Table 1 – Questionnaire with the responses of the participants (identified with letters A to L) A Spanish version was used at the seminar.

Your ideas about language learning and about language teachers	1 (strongly agree)	2	3	4	5 (strongly disagree)	No answer
1. Languages (L1 and L2) are learned mainly through imitation	B, E, H, J, K, L		A, C, D, F, G			
2. People with high IQs are good language learners		C, E	A, H, K	D, F, J, L	B, G	
3. The most important factor for learning an L2 is motivation	A, B, C, D, F, G, H, J, L	E, K				
4. Some people have a special gift for language learning.	B, C, G, J, K, L	A, D, E, F		H		
5. It is best to learn an L2 in the same way as you learn your L1.	B, G, H	D, E, F, K, L	C, J	A		
6. The earlier an L2 is introduced in school, the greater the likelihood of success in learning	B, E, H, J, L	A, C, G, K	D, F			
7. Most of the mistakes made by L2 learners are caused by differences with the L1.	H, J	D, E, G, K, L	C, F			A, B
8. Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.	J, L	E, G, H, K	C, D, F	A		B
9. When L2 learners interact freely (in groups or pairs), they pick up each other's mistakes.		E, K	C, H	F, G, J	A, D, L	B
10. Learners learn what they are taught.	L	H, J	E	A, C, D, F, G, K	B	
11. Teachers should only use the L2 in the L2 classroom.	D	E, L	A, C, F	H, K	B, G	J
12. Teachers should avoid explicit discussion of grammar.	J, L	G	C, D, E	A, K	B, F, H	

13. Language learners should aim to sound like native speakers.	L		C, D, G, H, J	K	A, B, E, F	
14. Fluency is more important than accuracy in L2 speech.	J, L	A, C, E, H	G, K	D, F	B	
15. L2 learners should take responsibility for their own learning.	B, F, J, L	D, E, G, H	A, C, K			
16. It is necessary to know the L2 culture(s) to speak an L2.	B, D, F, K	A, H, J, L	C, G	E		
17. Learning an L2 is mostly about learning grammar rules.	L			C, D	A, B, E, F, G, H, J, K	
18. Sufficient L2 proficiency is the most necessary to become a qualified teacher.	A, F, H, K, L		C, D	E, G	B, J	

Source: Adapted from Lightbown and Spada (2011, xvii).

Despite the apparent lack of consensus, there are two statements in which only two of the options have been used (statements 1 and 3), that is, where there is a high consensus among the respondents. The statement with the highest degree of consensus is the one that maintains that the most important factor for learning an L2 is motivation (statement 3). In this regard, 9 participants strongly agree (option 1), while the remaining 2 opt for the following value (2). In group discussions, the teachers ratify their agreement on the importance of this factor and comment on its relevance in the initial stages of learning. They also discuss the importance of parents sending their children to study a language, as motivation can arise as a result of that:

> D[3]: Sure, I see it more than anything when one decides to start a language. If they send you, it is already more secondary, it helps you. But if you want to start a language there is already the motivation from the beginning.
>
> B: Sure, I started out of curiosity and well…
>
> A: They sent me, and I found out that I liked it.
>
> D: If they don't send you, you don't know.
>
> A: There are kids who say they want to go. The parents come and tell me: "She tells me she wants to learn." Today, exposure to language is very large: with TV, with computers, with cell phones.
> (Group 1)

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[3] All answers and group discussions were originally in Spanish. All quotations have been translated into English by the authors.

Continuing with the other idea with considerable consensus, 6 of the teachers strongly agree that languages (L1 and L2) are learned mainly through imitation (statement 1), while almost the other half agree to a medium degree (score 3) At this point, it is interesting to bring up the way they argued about it, since the teachers seem to focus on early language learning, in relation to the L1 (or multiple L1s), and on the L2 of very young learners. Nothing in their comments indicates their stance on adult learning:

A: L1 and L2 are primarily learned through imitation. I chose two

B: I chose one, which is I strongly agree

C: Yes, me too

D: I think more or less, I don't know if it is mainly through imitation

B: I was thinking of a theory that we read about in Psycholinguistics that spoke of how language develops as ...

A: The brain process

B: Sure, and it says that for example babies... well, babies... one-year olds, who are at the age of imitation, imitate the sounds of the mother

C: Sure, the mother tongue is also mentioned here

A: Sure, L1 and L2 are learned through imitation. And yes, because in fact there are young children who... I have a student whose father is in Poland, and the other day he told me about a little brother that he has in Poland with the father's partner, and he told me that the little one speaks three languages. The father speaks Spanish at home, so there we have the imitation, Polish because he is in kindergarten and French because the mother speaks French, so that indicates that imitation is fundamental.

B: Yes, and in the second language, for example, when they learn a foreign language, notice that there are children who, if the teacher pronounces the word in a particular way, they pronounce it the same.

A: Yes, that is dangerous, because if they learn it well, great, but if the teacher pronounces it wrong, it is very difficult to unlearn it. That's for us, to keep in mind how important it is to be good at phonetics.

B: Yes, more than anything because one thinks that teaching a young child can be done by anyone and it is the most difficult thing to do. That is the basis.
(Group 1)

With a majority of just over half (6 respondents), the teachers responded that they strongly agree that some people have a special gift for language learning (statement 4), followed by 4 teachers in the following score (2). The group discussion allows us to learn the opinion of the only teacher in disagreement and, at the same time, to see how the teachers related this question to the one about IQ (statement two):

> D: Four, but because a special gift… I didn't like the word "gift".
>
> A: The word "gift" stuck with me, of course.
>
> D: But when you say in two, for example, that people with high IQ are good language learners.
>
> A: I strongly disagreed with that.
>
> D: I chose halfway there.
>
> A: Me too, number three.
>
> D: Because I say, you saw what we did when you see the biography of someone who...
>
> C: I think it can be both, I have students who do very poorly in all subjects except English.
>
> A: Sure.
>
> C: Or the other way around.
>
> A: While the IQ is obviously important but then the emotional quotient, all the rest is...
>
> F: For me it is not as important as they say, there are all those theories that speak of another intelligence, namely of linguistic intelligence.
>
> A: In fact, now companies are taking, they are giving more importance, when someone is hired, to evaluate the emotional quotient more than the intelligence one.
>
> F: Because the intelligence one measures mathematical knowledge, I don't know if you took any IQ tests.
>
> C: And actually, maybe with training you can improve them.
>
> A: Sure.
>
> C: On the other hand, you have to question the emotional aspect and make an effort to make it work.
> (Group 2)

Precisely statement 2 is of great interest in order to probe these teachers' conception of learning. Even though the theory of multiple intelligences is well established (GARDNER, 1994), there is a certain attachment, although to different degrees, to the importance of IQ, which was an important landmark of traditional pedagogy (see table 1).

Also linked to the psychological theories of learning, it is interesting to examine statement 9: "When L2 learners interact freely (in groups or pairs), they pick up each other's mistakes." Although it would seem to be an assumption that is superseded by current trends in group and collaborative learning (NUNAN, 1992; KAGAN, 1994), responses are evenly distributed, although none of the respondents declare they totally agree (see table 1).

In this sense, the exchange of perspectives is interesting, since in the oral discussion two ideas arise about errors: that errors (for example, detecting errors in others) can favor learning and that it is important to work with peer feedback, both very current postulates within communicative pedagogy (LUNDSTROM; BAKER, 2009):

> A: Sure, also to detect the error in the other, right? Not only the one who makes it, but also the other, who realizes it and that is very useful.
>
> C: That is good to do with writing.
>
> A: Yes, I was just going to say that.
>
> C: Among peers it is very good, because among themselves they see the error.
>
> A: I am changing the dynamics, and sometimes I do not take their texts home, in the end I do take them, but first I make them exchange them. Some learners do not like their peers to see their writing.
> (Group 2)

Within this same group of psycholinguistic items, statement 15 "L2 learners must take responsibility for their own learning" refers to the role of autonomy in learning (LITTLE, 1991, 2007), another very current issue. The item can also be interpreted in the sense of studying and completing tasks. In any case, the teachers expressed a strong agreement with it, as the answers are concentrated among the three highest values (1, 2 and 3). In their oral discussion, they do not only justify their choice, but also generalize this statement to learning situations in general (not just language) and relate it to the age and maturity level of the learner:

> B: Because it happens to me with ..., bah, not me but my colleague, who complains about teenagers who do not take the subject seriously, who are studying a language and do not do their homework, or the writing tasks she assigns.

C: I think that it is not something related to language, I think it is also something of the generation, of the age, but hey.

B: Yes, yes.

A: As here we are not talking about a certain age or an age group…

B: Yes, I put it as an example.

C: Yes, with the young ones it wouldn't happen either, the parents are responsible.

D: That is what I said before, it also depends on each student, the interest they have in correcting themselves, that is, I for example use feedback a lot, and I try to incorporate it, and there are people who...

C: Sure, but you are a teacher student, it's something else, in a high school, in a school it's like...
(Group 2)

Also with a majority of just over half, the teachers agreed on a score very close to total disagreement (4) about the fact that learners learn what they are taught (statement 10). However, at this point we already begin to notice some dispersion: two are almost in total agreement (score 2), while each of the rest is distributed in each of the other answers. Despite internal disagreement, this item does not elicit an interesting discussion.

All the teachers, although with different degrees of conviction (between scores 1 and 3), subscribe to the idea that most of the errors made by L2 learners are due to differences with L1 (statement 7). The teachers discuss the concept of "false friend" and structural differences, such as the difference in the use of articles or the transfer of phrases:

A: Well, I have extremes at seven.

B: Me too.

A: "Most of the mistakes made by L2 learners are caused by differences with the L1." Yes, totally. For me, I very much agree.

B: They make a comparison, but if in Spanish you conjugate the verb...

A: No, the typical one is "actually". Yesterday in class it appeared, and I told them this it is "in fact", not "currently". And well, there I introduced the notion of false friends, as this is one of the many false friends that show up all the time, like sensible-sensitive.

B: Yes, all the time.

D: And "I am agree" too. In other words, I think we compare it because we say "Estoy de acuerdo" so we cannot understand that there is a verb that means "I agree".

C: Yes, once the verb "to be" is learned…

B: They want to put it everywhere, because it is so hard to learn that once they grabbed it, they say, I put it here because it sounds familiar. It also happens to me with adults. We were reviewing the simple past and they told me: "I went to the cinema the last week" because in Spanish it is "la semana pasada", and to make them understand that "the" should not be there, it took me a lot of time.

A: Yes, about the use of "the" as well.

B: Yes, everywhere.
(Group 2)

Two items on the list refer to grammar, although from a different perspective. In this regard, no trend is found in "Teachers should avoid explicit discussion of grammar " (statement 12), as the answers equally cover the entire range of options. The subsequent exchange of opinions makes it clear that the diversity of answers can be due to different ways of understanding the statement. Furthermore, it shows that some teachers equate explicit grammar to the whole class being about grammar and in other cases to a deductive approach to grammar. They also seem to think that in the communicative approach there is no place for explicit grammar and that L2 is learned in the same way as the L1. This view of the communicative approach may reflect the early stages of this approach, but not the current version, which gives a clear place to "focus on form" (ELLIS, 2015).

C: Now, twelve?

A: That is very controversial.

B: I chose "very much in agreement".

C: I chose three.

A: I chose two, "teachers should avoid explicit discussion of grammar".

B: I agreed very much, the class does not have to be all grammar.

A: No, no, did you say that you disagree?

B: Strongly agree, that it shouldn't just be grammar.

A: Ah, they should avoid explicit discussion of grammar… no, I chose no. To avoid?

B: I agreed very much.

A: Avoid... do you think?

D: I disagreed. I mean... ah explicit, as if to say try to...

B: For me they should avoid it.

C: Sure, "s" goes here, then the verb, like that, very explicit, avoid that.

B: Ah, sure, I got it in a different way, I misinterpreted it, that's why.

A: I chose two because that was ambiguous.

C: It's about the age too, obviously you are not going to explain a grammar rule explicitly to the young ones because they will not understand you, abstract ideas they still do not understand.

B: Sure, I took it in that sense, they should avoid that the class is all explicit grammar.

C: There is explicit and implicit teacing. You have the texts, and then the children, they discover the rule, and if you don't teach it to them directly.

A: Sure, the good thing is to induce it, but sometimes…

B: Sure, sometimes it's complicated.

A: There are certain things that well... the third person, how do you explain it in the simple present? Or other things that are... what do I know, for example, the possessive case, that in Spanish they have it...

D: Yes, the other way around.

A: Word order, for example "Who did you go to the theater with?"

B: Yes, yes.

A: For example, I remember because the other day I gave an example of that, the person at the end of the question, they are things which are very different from ours, the structure, the order. Right?

B: Sure, with my adults the other day we were repeating the simple present, the questions, so they asked all the questions with "did" [sic]. Later, when I showed them another structure that read "What was the last time you bought an ice cream?", they wanted to put the verb in past tense. They made a mess!

A: They don't have to use "did".

B: Sure!

A: After I told them so much about "did", well, not here.

B: "But why do you use the verb in past tense here if you used it in the infinitive before?" and I had to explain again, and then they get all confused, poor things.

A: Of course, if you are teaching it from the communicative point of view, they don't even consider it.

C: No, you ignore it, of course, but they acquire it that way, naturally, like the mother tongue.
(Group 1)

The other group addresses the discussion about the teaching of grammar from the point of view of the vehicular language used to make the explanations. There seems to be a consensus that it is important to explain grammar in the target language, although one participant comments that, in Germany, grammar is explained through translation and nevertheless good learning results are obtained:

D: What about number twelve?

E: Twelve?

D: The one about grammar.

E: Oh so good!

D: That's the bomb. I chose five. Strongly disagree.

A: I four.

E: Me five. Strongly disagree. I think you have to address the grammar, and if possible explain it in the same language that you are teaching.

A: Sure.

E: If possible, explain it in the second language, in the language you are teaching. In Germany, for example, those who came to live in my house, they learn Spanish through translation. If you mention the word translation here...

D: Sure, and you're...

E: Bad word, you should not mention it. You speak a word in Spanish, and you are punished, on the other hand, in Germany, through translation, the two Germans that I had staying at my place spoke perfectly fluent Spanish. And all they do is write, they don't even speak it, and since they came here, it was impressive how easily they acquired the language.

Of course, they study English and German from a very young age, but through translation...
(Group 2)

However, there is a strong agreement in not accepting that "learning an L2 is mostly about learning grammar rules" (statement 17). The answer to this statement seems to be in tune with another statement: the one that maintains that "it is necessary to know the culture(s) of L2 to speak the L2" (16), on which there is strong agreement. In a brief exchange, two aspects of culture learning are highlighted: the history of the countries where the language in question is spoken and the history of the language itself:

B: Is it necessary to know L2 cultures to speak L2?

D: Totally.

A: Totally.

B: I chose two.

C: When I started studying, I didn't know anything.

A: I strongly agreed.

B: Not to the extreme but hey, I chose two because as you learn you incorporate things from the culture, maybe you can start and have no idea where England is, where the United States are, then you gradually incorporate it.

A: Of course, it is very important, for example, what do I know, within the cultural sphere, the history of the English language.

B: Yes.

A: That is very important because you learn certain words, which ones were Anglo-Saxon, which ones were from the Vikings.
(Group 2)

It is also interesting to examine another pair of statements, which in principle could be considered contradictory: "Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits" (statement 8) and "Fluency is more important than accuracy for L2 speech" (statement 14). Here, there is a slight majority towards agreement (see table 1). Related to the statement on the errors, a "fossilization theory" is named in a group. Here, it is interesting to highlight that a reference is made (although somewhat vaguely) to a theory of language acquisition, which is neither frequent in the present material nor in the findings of other studies, since it seems that very seldom teachers refer to theory in their reflections and comments

(EBSWORTH; SCHWEERS, 1997 *apud* BORG, 2015). Both groups, when reflecting on errors, embrace the very current idea that the correction of errors by the teacher must attend to the context, including the type of task in question, the age and the disposition of the learners (this discussion is exemplified below with the exchange by group 2). Group 1 also extensively discusses the difference between what we can call summative feedback (where a grade is given) and formative feedback, which consists of making learners work with errors. The discussion on this topic is extensive (we have only included excerpts for space reasons), which may indicate that error correction and feedback-giving are central concerns in these teachers' professional lives.

A: I chose "strongly in agreement" in eight, "Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits".

B: Yes, I also agreed "very much" with a theory about fossilization that we read about in the teacher training course, which says that when you learn something with an error, it fossilizes. It gets ingrained and it is very hard to get it out. And I studied it, and I saw it from theory and then put into practice I realized that it was so. I had kids who came from another institute, as you say, mispronouncing a word, and it took me a whole year to correct the word, and what's more, at the time of the final exam, they mispronounced it again and well, it is really hard.

C: Sure, I…, it may depend on age, with kids, who obviously take it as something natural, I would correct it the moment I hear it, but I have seen adults out there who are a bit reluctant, so I would tell them later, or I let them talk and then at some point I interrupt them.

A: Well, for example, in a speaking class, I don't interrupt children, adults, or teenagers. I don't correct anyone because otherwise you make them stop talking, you inhibit them.
(Group 2)

A: One of the things that they get frustrated about, that they told us in a course recently, is the grade, the number, they see the grade, four, five and they stay with that and do not look at the error in the test. So now what they recommend is to give grades with positive comments. They read that and read the error. If you give them a four, a five they only see the four, the five and they do not see the error.

C: What I do...

E: The point is that they should not see the grade, it is a big mistake. In fact, there isn't. No teacher would tell you "here you made a mistake".

D: But imagine that you give them a bad grade and then say "let's have a look at the mistakes", no one is going to want to go see the mistakes or anything.

A: Sure, nobody pays attention to you.

C: I haven't graded tests for years when I give them feedback. The test without a grade: "what grade did I get?" don't worry about the grade, let's have a look at the mistakes.

E: Yes X, but when primary school demands it, what do you do?

C: No, no, later they get the grade, but I say, I correct, I do not give the grade and I give it to them so that they can look at it and then we correct the errors together.

E: Perfect. Don't they ask you "what grade did I get?"

C: Yes, I tell them "I don't know, you'll find out later." Since they have nothing to do but correct, they devote themselves to correcting, anxiously awaiting the grade, but correcting.
(Group 1)

The oral exchange on the importance of fluency reveals agreement between the teachers, even though each one translated it into a different score. This situation justifies the use of different data collection techniques such as those carried out in this article to achieve a better understanding of what teachers' cognition really hides. In the following exchange, the teachers continue to discuss the correction of errors and seem to agree that the errors to be corrected are those that impede communication. Thus, one of the teachers comments on the importance of phonetics over grammar, something she heard in a training course.

C: Fourteen?

A: "Fluency is more important than accuracy for L2 speech."

D: Almost strongly disagree, number four.

C: I chose two.

B: I chose one, but it should be there in the middle, maybe. It is important that they speak fluently, that they do not speak as if they were repeating a structure by heart.

A: Yes, that is true, it has happened to me. I would choose two.

B: And sometimes it is more important that they know how to keep the thread of the conversation, it does not matter if they make a mistake. I

always tell the kids, we teach grammar a lot, but sometimes, if you don't put an "s" on a verb, you will be able to communicate anyway.

A: I believe that the error, the limit of acceptance of the error on our part is communication, if that hindered communication. In fact, in the course I took the other day at Cambridge University, they talked about kids, about the exams for "young learners". And then they talked about evaluation criteria, that while... how many, what errors should be accepted, that they should not impede communication. If you understood it, that's fine. At that level it is fine, if you understood what they wrote, the sentence. Well, the question is then to start correcting them, right? And that they understand that that was wrong.
(Group 1)

C: Let's see, I have students who talk all the time and you can see the number of mistakes they make, but they have a fluency within that framework of mistakes that is incredible.

A: Which is important too, because fluency takes you anywhere afterwards, regardless of the mistakes you make.

C: It also depends on what you do it for. In other words, if you go abroad, as a tourist, and talk like that, badly, but they understand you, the goal is accomplished.

A: The goal, yes.

C: If you have to give a lecture, you are very fluent, but you make a lot of grammatical mistakes, you will not be so credible.

D: Sure, it takes both.

E: Last year I was in a seminar and there was an English teacher trainer and she asked us this question, and she also asked us what is more important, grammar or pronunciation, and the conclusion was that pronunciation is definitely the most important, because grammar, if they conjugate a verb wrong, you complete it in your head. "Yesterday I am going to go to the center", your head immediately interprets: he is a foreigner, yesterday he went to the center. But if the pronunciation is poor there is no way to complete it. That's what the teacher had concluded.
(Group 2).

Another series of statements implicitly contains the acquisition-learning dimension: "It is best to learn an L2 in the same way as you learn your L1." (statement 5).

"The earlier an L2 is introduced in school, the greater the likelihood of success in learning" (statement 6).

"Teachers should only use L2 in the L2 classroom" (statement 11).

While teachers agree with the first two, there is a disagreement among respondents regarding the last one (see table 1). In the oral dialogue, only the statement about the use of L2 by the teacher is discussed. Here the differences in responses are partly explained as a matter of interpretation of the sentence, and the topic of discussion that arises is the use of body language in the classroom to facilitate understanding when L2 alone is too difficult:

> C: Eleven?
>
> B: No, I didn't choose anything there.
>
> D: Yes, I answered that I strongly disagree: "Teachers should only use L2 in L2 class."
>
> C: No, I have a two.
>
> A: Me too.
>
> B: What I chose is like…, I kept thinking and I didn't complete it.
>
> A: Yes, in fact yesterday we sent a statement to the parents of the new students explaining this methodology. We use body language a lot in high school, because the young ones at the beginning ... the young ones, the teenagers, the adults, everyone. But it seems very important to me. I explained the other day that English was not something that was inside the book.
>
> B: Yes, at first it is somewhat shocking, for adults and children, but later they thank you and it is something else.
>
> D: I got it wrong. I understood that teachers cannot use the second language outside.
>
> A: No, teachers should only use L2 in class. In other words, you speak in English from "good morning" to "good bye".
>
> B: Obviously, when I see them completely lost, with eyes that show they don't understand anything, you sometimes have to turn to their mother tongue.
>
> A: That's why sometimes I tell them, they are all with their heads down, so I tell them: "Let's see, I'm playing a clown, a little monkey here and

nobody looks at my mimicry?" Then they raise their heads, because I help them. Another typical one, "stubborn", I show them "stubborn" with body language. One day I taught them "faint" and threw myself on the floor. That group will never again forget what "faint" means. This is "faint", and I collapsed on the floor. It was a shock, but they won't forget that "faint" means to pass out.

C: Body language is something natural too, when you go to another country where you don't know the language, you also use your body to express yourself. And that's how people interact even though language is a barrier.
(Group 1)

Finally, two statements refer to the importance of the level of language to be achieved by the teacher and the student: "Language learners should aim to sound like native speakers" (statement 13) and "Sufficient L2 proficiency is the most necessary to become a qualified teacher" (statement 18).

The majority strongly agree that a good command of L2 is the most important thing in the case of the teacher, although responses towards the other extreme are also present (scores 3 to 5). On the other hand, when referring to the learners, there is an agreement in not agreeing with the statement, probably due to the rejection of the native speaker as an ideal and/or due to the value that other elements of language learning, such as communicative competence, cultural knowledge and intercultural competence, have achieved.

Regarding the importance of language mastery by the teacher, motivation and knowing how to communicate/explain are mentioned as more important factors. The respondents seem to agree that even though they are native Spanish speakers, they do not feel qualified to teach this language, which indicates that, according to them, mastery of the language is not enough:

A: In eighteen I strongly agree.

C: In eighteen I chose four.

B: Well, I don't know what I chose there, I think I was in a hurry. "Sufficient L2 proficiency is the most necessary to become a qualified teacher".

C: No, well, there I come to the topic of native people.

B: I disagreed because you can have all the knowledge, but if you don't know how to communicate and explain and if you are not motivated when teaching, then it doesn't work.

A: As if I could start teaching Spanish tomorrow!

D: Exactly!

(Group 1)

The disagreement with the statement about the native speaker as an ideal for L2 acquisition arises not only because it is an unattainable goal, but also because there is not one single native speaker, but many different regional or idiolectal manifestations:

B: Well, at thirteen I chose the middle position.

A: Me too, "L2 learners should aim to sound like native speakers" no, but you can't ask for that. Imagine that native speakers...

C: Yes, no, impossible.

B: Sometimes we don't even speak like native speakers.

C: I chose five.

D: I chose three.

A: I chose three too.

D: Because in the sense, not as a native.

B: I also chose three.

D: I mean, I don't disagree, but to have a high level of competence, yes, be more or less competent like a native but we cannot be so demanding. You don't have to be so basic either, that's what I'm saying.

A: No, of course. But what happens is that it arises from thought.

B: Yes.

A: So you do it gradually and it also depends ...

B: And there are phrases and expressions that they use every day that you cannot find in any books.

C: No, more than anything I think they also try to sound like a native. It's the same in Spanish, everyone has their own accent, their own "r", their own "s"... the same thing happens with English. So they should not get frustrated, "I want to sound like ..." and no, never, not even I, no matter how much I have a Ph.D., master's degree, whatever, I will never get there because I was not born, I was raised in another culture.

A: Sure, you learned it elsewhere.

D: Then you move to a small town in Alaska and it will be different from the native speakers of New York.
(Group 1)

Discussion and conclusion

The results obtained in this study present interesting contact points with the results of previous studies, mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The first issue, which we have already mentioned, is related to the degree of consensus among participants, which, as we have seen, has not been high in this study, unlike previous ones. This can probably be explained by the heterogeneity of the group. In this sense, we have detected contradictions or at least the coexistence of different psychological theories about how a foreign language is learned when comparing the participating teachers to each other.

Another issue discussed in the theoretical section refers to the impact of the various degrees in which the teacher feels sure of their own knowledge on the decisions made in the classroom. In this sense, comments arose about the importance of the teacher's own pronunciation skills and the comparison with the native speaker, in the most extreme case:

A: "L2 learners should aim to sound like native speakers" no, but you can't ask for that. Imagine that native speakers ...

C: Yes, no, impossible.

B: Sometimes we don't even speak like native speakers.
(Group 2)

In section 2.2 we referred to the differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers recorded by previous studies. To verify whether seniority is a decisive variable, we have focused on the three most experienced teachers (the three with thirty years of experience), identified as B, G and L in table 1. These three teachers agree with each other in the two statements that enjoyed broad agreement among all teachers (statements 3 and 4). In the other cases, their answers coincide or are close to each other in a significant number of items, although not in all. Therefore, our small-scale study does not support the assumption that teachers with equal seniority agree with each other. This can be explained by the complexity of teachers' cognition and by the diversity of influences on which it is based. Among these influences we can mention own experience as language learners (for example: "this is how it happened to me, when I started studying English"), teaching experience ("I remember because the other day I gave an example of that"), and in-service training ("last year I was in a seminar and there was an English teacher trainer and she asked us this question"; "one of the things they get frustrated with, that they told us in a course recently"; "in the course that

I took the other day at Cambridge University, they talked about children"), including the course from which we obtained the data analyzed here ("Should they be corrected immediately to prevent them? I don't know, that's why I'm asking").

We mentioned above that we, from a methodological point of view, have given priority, as far as possible, to the direct reproduction of teachers' opinions, in order to document their professional vocabulary. In this sense, the material analyzed shows that the teachers do not use a specific professional terminology. We have registered a few grammatical terms in the group discussions, but there are very few allusions to current didactic terminology. Discussions are conducted mostly in terms of everyday language and there are very few direct references to theories or authors in the area. Previous studies on teacher cognition have emphasized the importance of pedagogical content knowledge (SHULMAN, 1986), including a shared professional terminology, to cement teacher identity (MEIJER; VERLOOP; BEIJAARD, 1999). Although it is difficult to know why these teachers do not make greater use of technical terms belonging to the area of language learning, we can conjecture that a greater knowledge and a greater incorporation of professional terms into their discourse could contribute to creating greater consensus and greater awareness among colleagues.

From a methodological point of view, the combination of individual written reflection data with oral group exchanges has contributed to a deeper understanding of the participating teachers' thoughts and beliefs. In other words, while a standardized instrument with objective scores (the questionnaire with a Likert scale) allows for verifiable results, the oral discussion of criteria makes it possible to disambiguate responses. And even more importantly, it allows for an exchange of opinions with the consequent professional enrichment for the participating teachers, as they need to justify their choices based on the various kinds of personal experiences listed above.

Future studies should explore other elicitation forms to tap teachers' cognition, such as concept maps or metaphor selection, which we have not included in the present analysis due to a lack of space. At the same time, future studies should replicate the instruments in a larger number of teachers.

Through this study, it is also our hope to contribute to the field of language teacher training by highlighting the potential value of including reflection exercises inspired by the data collection instruments normally used in the teacher cognition research field. Our experience is that reflection, both individual and with colleagues, favors teachers' professional development, as it provides opportunities for a better self-understanding of own motivations, knowledge base and ideas acquired through different types of experiences.

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FERNÁNDEZ, S.; POZZO, M. A study on foreign language teachers' cognition in Argentina. **Alfa**, São Paulo, v.65, 2021.

- *RESUMEN: En este artículo discutimos cómo el campo de investigación denominado Cognición Docente (en inglés Teacher Cognition Studies) puede contribuir a nuestra comprensión del papel del docente de lenguas en el aula y al mismo tiempo ayudar a calificar la capacitación docente, brindando herramientas de reflexión. Presentamos algunos resultados extraídos de un estudio de caso basado en un seminario de un día de duración en el que un grupo de profesoras argentinas de lenguas extranjeras, tanto en servicio como en formación, tuvieron la oportunidad de entrar en contacto con esta área de estudio y reflexionar y discutir sobre sus conocimientos, creencias y sentimientos a partir de una serie de ejercicios tanto individuales como grupales. Nuestro análisis da cuenta de las opiniones y reflexiones que surgieron en las respuestas a los ejercicios y en las discusiones grupales que se generaron durante el día, ya que estas reflejan los aspectos de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras que resultan más cruciales para las profesoras en cuestión. Además, presentamos en cierto detalle la estructura del seminario, ya que nuestra intención es proponer los beneficios de incluir un enfoque en la cognición docente en los cursos de capacitación y perfeccionamiento para docentes de lenguas.*

- *PALABRAS CLAVE: cognición; docente; lenguas extranjeras; Argentina.*

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