Report Summary

Speaking in the Target Language and Impact on Outcomes

Sponsored by:
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USSOCOM

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PURPOSE: This document summarizes trends and predictive relationships among instructor and student during-training speaking in the target language (TL) and student proficiency outcomes (e.g., end-of-training OPI results), using data collected from the Special Operations Forces (SOF) community.

RESULTS:

- Within a class, students who spoke more frequently in the TL were more likely to exceed the ILR level 1/1 OPI standard than classmates.
- Students that showed greater growth in the amount they spoke in the TL throughout training were also more likely to exceed the 1/1 OPI standard.
- Instructors who spoke more in the TL had trainees who spoke more in the TL and demonstrated greater post-training proficiency.
- Trainees with low perceived capability (i.e., task self-efficacy) and high performance-avoid goal orientation (PAGO; i.e., those more concerned with how negatively others view the) tended not to engage as fully in speaking the TL as those with low PAGO (i.e., those less concerned with negative appearances).

APPLICATION: This information can be used to encourage both students and instructors to speak in the TL as much as possible and limit the amount of English used in the classroom. Further, evaluation opportunities can be put in place to monitor the amount of time that students and instructors are speaking in the TL during class. Lastly, training design characteristics may help facilitate greater engagement for higher PAGO learners, e.g.:

- Error framing, error-encouragement
- Exploratory learning
- Use "Small Wins" strategy to help increase self-efficacy

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[1]Originally prepared by ALPS Solutions, which was acquired by ALPS Insights.

Introduction

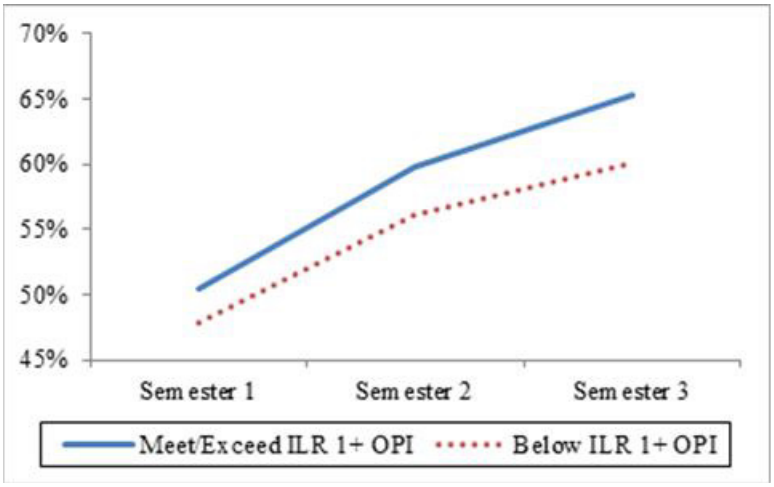
The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is the test of record for the Special Operations Forces (SOF) community. Most branches require SOF personnel to achieve Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) level 1/1 on the OPI at the end of initial acquisition language training. This document summarizes analyses conducted by ALPS Solutions investigating trends and predictive relationships among instructor and student during-training speaking in the target language and student foreign language proficiency outcomes (e.g., end-of-training OPI results, confidence in performing language tasks).

Prior evidence has shown performance goal orientations to be important trainee characteristics contributing to success in training. Performance goal orientation is theorized to influence learner behaviors, which in turn predict learning.

Findings

Students Who Speak More in Class Perform Better on the OPI.

In a 2009 study, it was found that within a class, students who spoke more frequently in the target language were more likely to exceed[1] the ILR level 1/1 OPI standard than classmates. This effect emerged as early as Semester 1 (approximately a third into training). Not only did students who spoke more in the target language at Semester 1 tended to achieve higher proficiency outcomes, but students who showed greater growth in the amount they spoke the target language throughout training were also more likely to exceed the standard. This demonstrates that more speaking during class is associated with higher proficiency.



[1] Exceeding the proficiency standard was defined as achieving a 1/1+ or 1+/1 and above on the two-skill OPI. This criterion was chosen because at the school of interest nearly 100% of the students reach the ILR level 1/1 standard.

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The implication of these findings is, if caught early, students falling behind can be remediated. To catch these trends early, it is recommended to monitor classes to determine the level of speaking and then provide feedback. Further, encourage student speaking early in the course.

Instructors Who Speak More in the Target Language have Students Who Speak More in the Target Language.

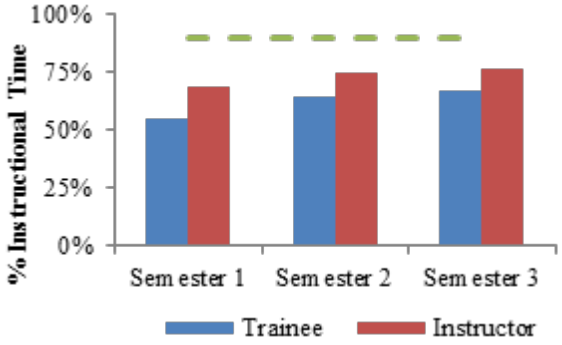
The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) recommends a 90% target language speaking rate in the classroom from the start of training for both instructors and students.[2]

Results presented in the 2012 USAJFKSWCS Training Trend Report indicate that instructors who spoke more in the target language had trainees who spoke more in the target language and demonstrated greater post-training proficiency. In general, instructors speak in the target language more often than trainees.

Instructors are the drivers of speaking in the target language. According to the students, instructors spoke in the target language between 7-11% more often than students throughout training.

This finding demonstrates that instructors are the key to speaking in the classroom. Instructors who speak more have students who speak more and do better. If the goal is to have students reach this 90% goal it is likely their instructors will need to be speaking almost exclusively in the target language.

Category I/II Languages



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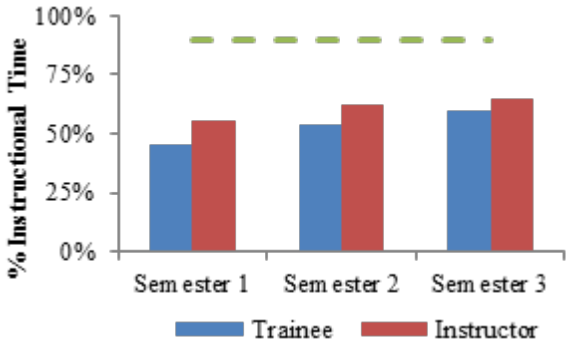
Category III/IV Languages



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After USSOCOM Changed the Testing Standard from the DLPT to the OPI, Students Reported Higher Levels of Speaking in the Target Language.

In 2009, USSOCOM changed the testing standard from reading/listening assessed with the DLPT to listening/speaking proficiency assessed with the OPI. After the standard changed, students reported higher levels of speaking in the target language. This effect emerged throughout training.

Task Self-Efficacy Moderates the Relationship between Performance-Avoid Goal Orientation and Time Spent Speaking in the Target Language.

Prior evidence has shown performance goal orientations to be important trainee characteristics contributing to success in training. Performance goal orientation is theorized to influence learner behaviors, which in turn predict learning. Research distinguishes between performance-prove goal orientation (PPGO) from performance-avoid goal orientation (PAGO):

- PPGO individuals approach situations for which they expect to succeed.
- PAGO individuals avoid situations for which they expect to fail.

Whether or not performance-oriented individuals approach or avoid achievement situations depends on their confidence to accomplish the task. In application, PAGO individuals who are confident in their ability to accomplish a task should be more likely to engage in the task than those individuals who are less confident.

[2] American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2010). "ACTFL Position Statement on the Use of Target Language in the Classroom." http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=5151

Results of a moderator analysis showed that PAGO individual who had low confidence were even less likely to fully engage in the training task than those who had more confidence. So, PAGO coupled with low confidence is particularly problematic.

Failure to speak in the target language is problematic, in that opportunities for practice and performance feedback become less frequent. High PAGO individuals with low self-efficacy may put themselves at a disadvantage in terms of future learning.

Training design characteristics may help facilitate greater engagement for these types of learners, e.g.:

- Error framing, error-encouragement
- Exploratory learning (e.g., exploration & experimentation)
- Use "Small Wins" strategy to help increase self-efficacy (Dierdorff, Surface, and Brown, 2010). "Small Wins" refers to setting smaller goals early in the course to to allow learners early successes (Kozlowski et al., 2001).

Conclusion

The information provided in this summary can be used to encourage both students and instructors to speak in the target language as much as possible and limit the amount of English used in the classroom. Further, evaluation opportunities can be put in place to monitor the amount of time that students and instructors are speaking in the target language during class.

Full Citations

ALPS Solutions (2012, September). *USAJFKSWCS Basic Language Course 2011-2012 Training Trend Report (TTR) (*Technical Report *#2012010635).* Raleigh, NC: Author.

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