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Second Language Teachers' Approaches to the First Day of Class: An Investigation of Moral Agency

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Ranging from preschool to university-level settings, teachers' approaches to the 'first day of class', acknowledged as a crucial event (Patrick, Turner, Meyer & Midgley 2003), have received limited attention in research on second language (SL) teaching and learning. Most published materials, usually based on an author's personal preferences or current methodological recommendations, emphasize the importance of presenting one's self well and successfully establishing certain expectations for student behavior from the beginning of an academic term. However, little is known regarding what SL teachers actually say and do on the first day of class or how students perceive this crucial first meeting. Grounded in empirical data including classroom visits, teacher interviews, and student observations, the present qualitative study explores five university-level SL teachers' approaches to the first day of class. Specifically, this study analyzes these teachers' explicit and implicit communication of expectations regarding classroom rules and regulations (Johnston, Juhász, Marken & Ruiz, 1998) on the first day. Recent research on the morality of teaching (Jackson, Boostrom & Hansen, 1993; Johnston 2003) provides the framework for the data analysis. In the present study, teachers' words and actions revealed characteristics of their moral agency, exposed actual teaching practices, and have important implications for SL pedagogy that are also relevant to teaching beliefs and practices in other disciplines.

INTRODUCTION

As the second language (SL) teacher entered the classroom on the first day of the university semester, her students were sitting in rows, quietly reviewing course schedules, looking at textbooks, and reading text messages on their cell phones. Launching a class geared towards oral communication in this almost silent setting can rattle even an experienced teacher, and this educator was no exception. She methodically removed her books from her bag, set out the syllabi and lesson materials, and wrote the appropriate course number on the board. She tried to conceal her nervousness, intensified because it was the first day in her first tenure-track teaching position. Her new students seemed oblivious to her feelings, many of them likely managing their own anxiety, well-recognized in research on SL learning. To initiate dialogue with them, she confirmed (in the target language, Spanish) that they were there for "Spanish 103". Greeted with blank stares and one student's negative facial response, she quickly checked the room number and time to be sure she was in the right classroom. Suddenly panicked, she explained (now in English!) that she was in the wrong location and hastily gathered her things and departed, much to the amusement of several students. Once in the hallway she reviewed her own

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course schedule and discovered that she had indeed been in the right room after all. Embarrassed and trying to regain some sense of composure, she reentered the classroom to attempt to establish herself as a competent language teacher!

While perhaps an extreme example of a first day of class that started off very much on the proverbial “wrong foot”, this narrative describes my own experience. Though it was not in any sense ideal, one positive outcome resulted: From the very first day, students clearly understood that all kinds of mistakes would be made in the classroom. Later in the semester, my students laughed with me as we recalled my ridiculous entrance; my awkward start ultimately proved to break the ice and communicate that I, too, could be – and would be - embarrassed in class. Perhaps it is this experience, still with me seven years later, that has motivated my research interest in teachers' approaches to the first day of a new class, a setting that continues to challenge me as a teacher with each new group of students.

In spite of the generally recognized importance of ‘first impressions,’ relatively few studies have focused on the introductory experiences between teachers and their students at the beginning of a school term; what little information exists is mostly instructive in nature and based on anecdotal evidence. That is not to say that some of these reflective and informative essays are not helpful. In fact, several offer useful recommendations and thought-provoking commentary on a teacher's first encounter with a new group of students (for example, see Shadiow, 2009, for an extremely insightful narrative that points to several specific pedagogical implications; Andress, 1991, and Bjornstad, 2004, both offer very concrete recommendations for the first day of a beginning German class; Kreizinger, 2006, stresses “making connections” over “giving directions” on the first day; and Bennett, 2004, recommends an adaptable introductory activity to conduct with students during the first class meeting). Nevertheless, all suggestions regarding the first day of class should be carefully evaluated by teachers to be sure that they align appropriately with a teacher's own pedagogy and personal teaching characteristics.

For example, Snell (2000), a sociologist, encourages teachers to both establish themselves on the first day of the semester and to ward off undesirable students. His first specific suggestion is to bombard students with a “blizzard of paper” that he claims catches their attention and “overtly outlines every requirement and law that both students and I must follow, but covertly ‘overwhelms’ the ‘tourists’ who are looking for easy classes. Those who drop the first day are filled with late registrants whom I discover are less predatory” (p. 472). Stressing the importance of exercising one's classroom authority, he requires students to sign a contract stating that they understand the course rules. He administers a “brief test on English and syntax as well as some basic concepts of [his] field,” and, after about 50 minutes, “the first day is completed” (p. 473).

Snell's advice on how to “deal with students on the first day” is unsurprisingly absent from the second edition of *The Ethics of Teaching: A Casebook* (Keith-Spiegel, Whitley, Balogh, Perkins & Wittig, 2002). This collection of stories includes 195 hypothetical situations commonly faced by university teachers;

each case is described and specific recommendations are offered. Even though many of the issues under scrutiny are related to the syllabus, course expectations, and grading procedures – typical first day of class topics - none of the *Casebook* recommendations specifically addresse the importance of the first class meeting.

While the first class in any discipline is an important opportunity to set the tone for the course and to begin to establish expectations for any particular learning environment (see Hermann & Foster, 2008; Perlman & McCann, 1999; and Wilson & Wilson, 2007, for discussions of these issues in the context of the first day of a psychology class), an SL classroom offers its own unique characteristics. Indeed, research has demonstrated that the distinctive characteristics of SL teachers set their task apart from that of others (Borg, 2006). One integral way in which the SL classroom is significantly different from courses in other disciplines is that its course content also tends to serve as the vehicle through which students are exposed to the content. That is, while the language itself is what the students are expected to learn, current SL methodology prescribes teachers' almost exclusive use of the target language in the classroom, a situation resulting in unusual effects, three of which will be mentioned here.

First, Johnston, Juhász, Marken, and Ruiz (1998) found that SL teachers at times explicitly communicate that they do not particularly care what students say; they are mostly concerned that students attempt to express themselves in the target language and often send an ambiguous, moral message to students that, on the one hand, it is important that students communicate meaningful ideas, but on the other, that their primary objetive is that students say at least something. Second, Johnston et al. (1998) also analyzed a situation in which a SL student demonstrated that his listening comprehension had improved to the point of understanding and voluntarily participating in a class discussion. However, when he expressed an opinion the teacher believed to be in conflict with her own regarding a husband's influence on his wife's right to get a job, the student's oral participation and grammatically-correct response were no longer the goal of the activity. Rather, his teacher became very interested in the content of his statement and challenged his opinion; in so doing, she expressed her own values regarding a woman's right to work, thus sending a moral message to her class and perhaps even passing judgment on this particular student. And, finally, Johnston et al. (1998) also highlighted the prominent position that classroom rules and regulations hold in any course and explored the moral messages of distrust that these rules may send to students. Unique to most SL classrooms is the inherent need for students to participate orally in class and, despite their anxiety and lack of experience, use the language they are trying to learn, even on the first day of the course. Also unique to SL teaching are the challenges raised by the accessibility to students of translators (human or computerized) and unauthorized native-speaker assistance on assignments completed outside of class. These factors prompt SL teachers to establish and communicate related classroom rules and regulations to their language students.

Given the limited research on the first day of class in any discipline, this study focuses on five university-level SL teachers' presentation of rules and regulations to their respective students, a task that instructors of all disciplines face. To explore how teachers function as moral agents during the first day of class, this study systematically and empirically analyzes these teachers' perceptions of the first day, their words and actions on the first day, and their students' perceptions of this important first meeting. It is built on a framework positing a three-fold relationship between teachers' classroom expectations and their performance of moral agency: (1) teachers' establishment of rules and regulations is evidence of their power; (2) the existence of rules, to some extent, prejudges students; and (3) the rules themselves are often the criteria teachers use to define 'a good student.'

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

As noted earlier, the body of scholarly research focused on the first day of class is scant. Indeed, much research has been done to explore the importance and role of teachers' personal and professional identities (Alsup, 2006), their religious orientations (van Veen, Theunissen, Sleegers, Bergen, Klaassen, & Hermans, 2003), their personalities (Cooper, 2001), and their own beliefs about language pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Yoon, 2007), all factors that affect their behaviors and perspectives on classroom issues in many ways. But, these findings are not based on empirical data collected specifically on the first day of class. In language teaching research, there has been some emphasis on language teachers' and students' goals and expectations (Antes, 1999; Brown, 2009; and Mandell, 2002) but relatively little emphasis on teachers' expectations for students in the physical classroom and, more specifically, on teachers' communication of these expectations during their initial class meeting.

A recent article by Horwitz (2005) describes a classroom management course required of new in-service language teachers seeking certification in Texas. This course included practical information related to management issues including possible room arrangements, classroom rules, student work, the teacher's classroom presence, planning and conducting instruction, maintaining student behavior, communicating assertively, and dealing with typical behavioral problems. She emphasized aspects of classroom management that are extremely relevant to teaching, but paid no specific attention to the first day of class.

Chirol (1999) outlined the type of information that should be included in a handbook prepared by language program coordinators for new teaching assistants (TAs). She recommended the inclusion of a separate handbook section on the first day of class stating that it is "recognized as the most intimidating day to new TAs" (p. 356); however, her specific suggestions highlighted only the administrative duties of the TAs, the information that TAs should impart to their students, and other responsibilities related to appropriate placement levels and attendance on the first day. Her recommendations emphasized the necessity of securing consist-

ency in a large language program and of ensuring TAs' appropriate management of administrative issues.

Some researchers have taken a more reflective, exploratory approach to the first day of class, a "crucial event" in the words of Patrick, Turner, Meyer, and Midgley (2003), who carried out an insightful study in eight sixth-grade math classes. The math teachers' approaches to their respective first days of school were compared, and their classroom environments were classified as supportive, ambiguous, or nonsupportive. Over time, the researchers found that students' behavior in the supportive classrooms was significantly positive when compared to that of students in the other learning environments. The manner in which these teachers conducted the first days of class clearly influenced students' behavior (and, indeed, their learning) throughout their respective courses.

Another investigation also highlighted the importance of teachers' introductory supportive behaviors. Based on previous recommendations by Friedrich and Cooper (1999) for the communication classroom, Sparks, Villagran, and Boileau (2004) surveyed undergraduate students' views of the first day of class. In general, they found that students in various disciplines preferred teachers who seemed enthusiastic and helpful, managed time well, presented course materials and content clearly, and came across as "friendly" or "real" as they appropriately incorporated humor and icebreakers in their lessons. But one interesting finding of their study was the contradictory ways in which some students responded to the same teacher's behavior; for example, one student appreciated an instructor's joke-telling on the first day while another did not, and the fact that a first class had been dismissed early pleased one student but disturbed another. These students interpreted the teacher's words or actions quite differently. Specifically, some interpreted joke-telling as an indicator that the teacher was trying to make class enjoyable, while another felt that the attempts at humor wasted his time. This study convincingly demonstrated that a teacher's words and behaviors, perhaps especially on the first day of class, have an often unknown and complex effect on students who at times interpret the same teacher's messages in very different ways.

The Morality of Teaching

The influence of teachers' words and actions on students is of particular interest to researchers who investigate characteristics of teachers' moral agency, that is, the ways in which teachers communicate, explicitly and implicitly, and their expectations for classroom behavior; the first day of class is often seen as the opportune moment for communicating such information. Jackson, Boostrom, and Hansen (1993) and Johnston (2003) have claimed that teachers' expectations, expressed as rules and regulations, are related to teachers' moral agency for three different reasons:

First, the enactment of these rules is evidence of teachers' power and authority over their students. As Johnston (2003) concluded, "the exercise of power constitutes moral action, yet the values encoded in particular acts of power and

authority are complex and contradictory and are open to multiple and conflicting understandings" (p. 27). In other words, the values behind a teacher's rules are not always simple or transparent and, much like other messages sent by teachers (Sparks et al., 2004), they are often interpreted in different ways.

Second, teachers' expectations are related to moral agency because the very existence of rules is based on teachers' assumptions that students will break them (i.e., prohibitions against using cell phones, cutting class, and so on). Rules can convey a lack of trust on the part of teachers who base their evaluation of students on experiences with previous groups, not on current students' behavior. Johnston (2003) explained, "The lack of trust…arises from the fact that this group of learners, whom the teacher has never met before, are being prejudged on the basis of a previous, different group of learners—another denial of the unique relation between teacher and student" (p. 26).

And, third, teachers' expectations relate to moral agency because classroom rules express or define what it means to be a "good student"; that is, one who follows the rules that the teachers expect them to obey. Jackson et al. (1993) pointed out, "As most students soon discover, those who follow the rules become known as good students; those who disobey them suffer the wrath of their teachers and additionally run the risk of being thought of as troublemakers or worse by teachers and classmates alike" (pp. 12-13).

The three previously mentioned reasons for which teachers' expectations are related to moral agency provide the framework for the present analysis. Research on the morality of teaching, though it involves themes relevant throughout the course of an academic term, offers a particularly unique lens through which to view teachers' approaches to the first day of class: (1) teachers' establishment of rules and regulations is evidence of their power; (2) the existence of rules, to some extent, prejudges students; and (3) the rules themselves are often the criteria teachers use to define a "good student."

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The five SL teachers who agreed to participate in this study were full- or part-time teachers at the same institution, and each had been teaching for a number of years. They regularly taught beginning- and intermediate-level Spanish or Italian language courses. Each had post-graduate degrees, and they had all taught at their current institution for over two years. It is worth emphasizing that all five of these teachers are warm and caring people who genuinely like to teach their respective languages and enjoy their students. They strive to be innovative in their classrooms and to communicate with their students in meaningful ways.

It is not the intention of this study to criticize or judge these instructors for their actions or words, or to assert that their particular rules should be modified; indeed, as presented in much of the previously-highlighted research, most educators

identify with many of these teachers' ideas and practices. Moreover, this investigation's purpose is not to determine why these teachers behaved in particular ways. In fact, as mentioned earlier, previous research points to many influences on teachers' classroom practices. Rather, the goal was simply to find out what happened on their respective first days of class and explore how those initial occurrences reveal and relate to teachers' moral agency.

Context

The first day of class in most North American universities includes some elements that are relatively predictable, such as the teacher's presentation of the course syllabus to the students. While these five language teachers' individual approaches to the first day of class varied a bit, their first day lessons included at least some review of the course syllabus. These teachers all taught in the same multi-section language department and all followed a coordinated course syllabus written by their respective language coordinators. As Chirol (1999) emphasized, to achieve consistency in large language programs, teachers are instructed to follow the syllabus throughout the semester; the situation for these teachers was no exception.

The language department context in which they all taught stressed students' oral proficiency as a goal and emphasized a communicative approach to language teaching. The teachers were required to use departmental syllabi that included information regarding the course's grading scale, expected learning outcomes, textbook information, the instructor's personal contact information and the university's official statement on academic honesty.

Data Collection

The data collection instruments used in this study were designed to explore these teachers' goals and expectations for their SL students. Questionnaire and interview prompts focused on aspects of the first day of class about which I expected both teachers and students to have opinions and that would provide me with glimpses of their perspectives on this important first meeting.

A few weeks prior to the first day of class, I interviewed each of these five teachers about the goals and expectations they had for their students' performance and behavior, their language teaching methodology, their description of a typical first day in a language class, and the specific goals they try to accomplish during the first class session (see Appendix A for the list of interview questions). On average, these interviews lasted for approximately 20 minutes.

Then, I visited each of their introductory-level classes on the first day. The teachers wore lapel microphones so their voices would be clearly recorded, and I took notes during the class that would add information (such as the physical movements of the teachers, where they looked and stood, what they wrote on the board and so on). I also obtained copies of all written materials they used in class.

At the end of class, I distributed questionnaires (see Appendix B) to all students in the five classes. The classes were composed of 13-16 students. These questionnaires asked the students what they believed to be their teacher's goals for the first class, if the first class met their expectations, and what they thought the class would be like throughout the semester. I invited students to fill them out anonymously after class and slip the completed questionnaires under my office door.[1]

Following the first class but prior to the second, I interviewed each of the teachers again. I was interested in their perspectives on the first class session: if they would like to change something that they had done, if they believed they had accomplished their goals, how they communicated their expectations to their students, and what they believed were their students' reactions to this first class (see Appendix C for the list of interview questions).

Data Analysis

Findings were based on observational data (distributed course materials, observer notes from classroom visits, transcripts of the teachers' recordings, and student questionnaires) as well as interview data (pre- and post- teacher interviews). The aim of collecting this variety of data for the analysis was to achieve triangulation, that is, an understanding of the data that integrates multiple perspectives on the events that took place during the first class. These data were analyzed qualitatively: I explored these teachers' approaches to the first day of class by thematically coding recurring teacher practices and events of the first day and coordinating them with related interview discussion topics. Then, I analyzed the questionnaires and compared the students' perspectives on these issues with those of their teachers.

Clearly, the analysis is selective and exploratory (Wolcott, 1994); the effort was not to create generalizable findings but to break new ground in SL teaching research by discovering what some teachers are thinking, saying, and doing on the first day as well as to identify several areas for future research. Thus, the potential transferability of these findings to other contexts is left to the judgment of the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' MORAL AGENCY IN OPERATION ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

By way of introduction, what follows is a short description of each teacher's personality and teaching style, factors that are known to affect their classroom behaviors and pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Yoon, 2007). While clearly anecdotal and based on my subjective interpretation of the teachers' words and actions during my classroom visits, this account provides a bit more detail about the teachers as individuals and may provide the reader with a better understanding of the participants, a stronger familiarity with the data collection context and, in turn, a more-informed sense of the potential transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Linda (all teacher names are pseudonyms) is an easy-going teacher who is also a little shy; she radiates approachability and understanding and has an unhurried presence in the classroom. Cathy is more rule-oriented and business-like in class; at the same time, she clearly tries to make activities fun and sets a quick but engaging pace. Roberto is not a "run-of-the-mill" teacher. His approach is innovative, and he likes to incorporate technology in the classroom in every possible way. He gives the impression that he will be understanding of mistakes and willing to work with his students. Janet has been described by her students as "the nicest teacher in the world". She is a caring person who loves to teach and who truly wants students to learn and enjoy the target language. Julio is gifted with a sense of humor; he skillfully establishes himself as helpful and knowledgeable and tries to awaken students' imaginations and pique their interest through cognitive stimulation.

While there were interesting differences among the teachers, these data revealed several common themes particularly relevant to SL classes as well as to first classes in other disciplines. For example, all of these teachers indicated that they did not view the first class as typical of other class sessions throughout a semester, a not surprising observation perhaps but one that has passed with relatively little research attention in SL teaching contexts. And, they identified a variety of similar goals specific to the first day ranging from getting to know their students to finding the right classroom (the goal that I more or less failed to meet on my most memorable first class session!). Additionally, all of them indicated that one of their main first-day objectives is to outline their expectations for students. As highlighted in Jackson et al. (1993) and Johnston (2003), it is in the establishment, existence, and expression of these expectations, often framed as classroom rules and regulations, that the teachers' moral agency was most evident. Jackson et al. (1993), Johnston et al. (1998), and Johnston (2003) explored aspects of teachers' moral agency identified in data collected over a period of time including multiple class sessions; the present study focuses on these issues as they play out on the first day of class.

Three specific areas will be explored: (1) the establishment of rules (as evidence of power); (2) the existence of rules (that prejudge students); and (3) the expression of rules (that define a "good student").

Rules as Evidence of Power: Terms of Address and Cell Phones

Johnston (2003) identified evidence of teachers' power over students in their establishment of classroom rules and regulations and, as Johnston pointed out, the values carried by acts of power are often complicated and vulnerable to various interpretations. For instance, teachers' expectations regarding something as seemingly simple and personal as establishing forms of address for themselves and for their students is a site of potentially complex values and multiple understandings worthy of research attention. Specifically, when teachers frame as rules their preferences for particular names or titles but exercise their relative autonomy by themselves choosing what to call students, they clearly display their power and authority.

These kinds of issues are perhaps most obvious on the first day of class when a teacher is most likely to talk deliberately about the specific rules and regulations relevant to his or her particular classroom. During these first day classroom visits, three of the teachers in this study specifically instructed their students what to call them; two indicated preference for a title such as "Professor" or "Mr." (either in English or in the SL) while one explicitly stated that the use of her first name was entirely acceptable and that titles such as "Señorita" or "Profesora" were unnecessary. The other two teachers made no reference to the issue in class even though one (Roberto) told me in his second interview that he wanted students to use the title "Dr.", an expectation that he did not make explicit in his class. Rather than deliberately communicating his expectation as a rule, he displayed his name, prefaced with the title "Dr." when he discussed the course syllabus, digitally projected on a screen. Later, he told me in his interview that he hoped that some students caught this, as he called it, "subliminal message" to use his title.

Likewise, these teachers had different styles on the first day for addressing their students. Some introduced themselves to each student individually while others read students' names from a list. Interestingly, all but Roberto made some effort to learn and use students' names though none asked students how they preferred to be addressed; without exception, they simply used the students' first names. In fact, one teacher spontaneously made the decision to abbreviate a student's name in order to differentiate him from another student with the same name. Roberto, who wanted to be addressed as "Dr.", never used any students' names during the first class though they were displayed on his computerized gradebook and projected on a screen.

It is certainly an indication of power that teachers announce how they want to be addressed; moreover, their calling students by names that they themselves have chosen or assigned further confirms their authority. Even more complicated for students is an educational system in which they interact with teachers of different preferences, a situation in which certainly there are many opportunities for misunderstanding. Perhaps there is no better chance for misinterpretation than the situation in which a teacher possesses a particular expectation but does not make it explicit. For example, if one of Roberto's students had addressed him with his first name, an acceptable and even desirable practice in another section of the same course, the negative consequences of that action could have affected both that student and the teacher-student relationship throughout the semester. As seen in Sparks et al. (2004), who discovered contradictory reactions of students to teachers' first day behaviors, the values that are encoded in teachers' expectations, even those that are implied, are indeed complicated and offer dangerous potential for misunderstanding.

Even though most students are sufficiently socialized and savvy so as not to experiment with teachers' first names (and, indeed, often hesitate to use them even when told to do so), teachers' exercise of power in establishing acceptable forms

of address is evident. These expectations are often communicated either explicitly or implicitly as part of the rules and regulations on the first day of class.

Another interesting exercise of teachers' power concerns the use of cell phones, an issue, like terms of address, about which teachers have different expectations. By observing students' initial reactions in class when a cell phone rings, it is clear that they are exposed to a wide range of teacher expectations regarding the presence or use of cell phones in class; some students frantically scramble to silence the interruption while others calmly exit the room to take calls.

In the present study, Linda told her students during the first class, "I need to know that the telephones are turned off." Since she was speaking in the SL (also a moral issue given that she was establishing a rule that students were expected to follow even when they might not have understood what she said due to their lack of SL proficiency), she showed them a cell phone, hummed a musical series of beeps that possibly represented its powering off, and made a finger motion to her lips that indicated "shhh." As a classroom observer, I was not sure if she intended to communicate that cell phones should be off or simply in silent mode, and I still wonder which message was interpreted by her students. During her interview, Linda told me that she insists that a cell phone "shouldn't be in the classroom", or later in her words, "at least I shouldn't see it" because she claims to be an easily-distracted person. The lack of specification in her cell phone rule as she expressed it in her interview (i.e., no cell phones allowed versus her not seeing them) reflects the equally ambiguous message she sent her students in class (cell phones off versus in silent mode). It is clear that she does have expectations regarding cell phones for her students but the finer points of the rule were not clearly expressed either in class or in her interview. Most students' tendency to conform to classroom rules they socially expect might keep them out of trouble but once again the values and messages that teachers have and send – or do not send – are complex and open to different interpretations.

The cell phone rule as established by Julio, another teacher, raises other issues. He told his students in English that "none [should be] turned on but mine" and explained that he was the contact for relatives to call in case of an emergency. Certainly there is evidence of power when all parties in a given situation do not adhere to the same rules. In this case, Julio set a rule for his students that he himself did not intend to obey. Given Julio's agreeable nature, I find it likely that he would have granted permission to a student to turn on his or her cell phone were there a legitimate reason. Notwithstanding, since he intended to break his own rule, Julio felt compelled to justify his position to his students while Linda, though perhaps not clearly, merely stated it; even though their approaches were quite different, both teachers exercised their power and authority in the classroom by establishing, and in one case by choosing to break, certain rules.

Though requesting the use of a particular form of address is not exactly a rule in the same way as "No cell phone use," the request does carry moral significance because it expresses a value that can either be respected or ignored by

students. Moreover, when teachers take the liberty of calling students by names they themselves choose (including first names, nicknames, or even names they select in the target language), they also exercise their power and communicate their values. Students' interpretations of and responses to these displays of power, as communicated implicitly and explicitly on the first day of class, may or may not adhere to teachers' expectations.

Rules that Prejudge Students: Attendance and Homework

Many of the rules that teachers communicate on the first day of class are not based on the behavior of that particular group of students since, in most cases, they have entered the classroom only a few minutes prior and have not yet addressed their teachers by any name, used their cell phones, handed in late homework, or cut class. Nevertheless, by outlining these rules on the first day, and often detailing the consequences for breaking them, it is possible that teachers communicate that they do not trust students to do homework or to attend class responsibly, i.e., to do the right thing. Thus, some have claimed that the second reason for which classroom rules relate to teachers' moral agency is that the existence of these rules prejudges students (Johnston, 2003).

As previously mentioned, many researchers and teacher educators stress the importance of carefully setting up the administrative aspects of a course, including all relevant classroom rules, on day one (see Chirol, 1999; Horwitz, 2005; and Snell, 2000). They recommend explicit announcements concerning typically problematic areas such as academic honesty, attendance requirements and grading policies regarding issues such as the submission of late homework. According to Johnston (2003), these rules imply negative expectations thereby prejudging both students' behavior and their intentions to satisfy basic academic obligations, and, as such, these expectations constitute moral evaluations on the part of teachers. While a common practice, this indirectly-expressed lack of trust in students' commitment to their own learning and development has potentially negative implications on both relational and pedagogical levels, and therefore deserves attention.

However, this study takes a slightly different position by making one important distinction: Instead of claiming that the very existence of rules prejudges students, the argument is made that the existence of rules prejudges students only when a teacher's communication of those rules is motivated by the expectation that students will break them, a motivation that clearly can be determined only by those involved in a given situation (the teacher and, perhaps, that teacher's students). That is, without the teacher explicitly stating that certain rules are established specifically because the teacher expects the students to break them, an observer would be unable to ascertain the teacher's motivation for establishing any given rule. But, in the case in which a teacher communicates, either purposefully or unknowingly, that a rule has been established because students are expected to break it, the teacher reveals a lack of trust and his or her moral agency, as a critical evaluator of students' words and actions, operates in full force.

By examining rules that exist outside the classroom context, this distinction may be more clearly understood. The existence of rules and regulations of various types, along with a general respect for those rules, together provide a necessary structure for virtually every aspect of daily living. For instance, highway signs communicate all kinds of rules to motorists and, in part, are designed to prevent accidents. Highway chaos may result when drivers do not respect traffic laws. Nevertheless, the communication of these rules is not necessarily motivated by the expectation that motorists will break them; at times, traffic laws are explicitly communicated for informational and navigational rather than merely prescriptive or judgmental purposes. To take one specific example, a stop sign is not put in place because highway planners believe that drivers do not plan to obey it; rather, it is simply a guide meant to foster a safe, efficient flow of traffic. On the other hand, at times, police officers position themselves in concealed places near certain stop signs because they do indeed believe that drivers do not intend to stop.

An analogy can be made between stop signs and classroom rules. Course syllabi and teachers themselves communicate all kinds of rules to students who are expected to respect them. When students do not, chaos or confusion may result. Classroom rules are not necessarily put in place because teachers believe that students plan not to obey them; rather, the rules are guides meant to foster effective learning. On the other hand, some teachers at times behave as police officers; they either have never trusted students to be responsible and to do the right thing or, due to previous negative experiences, they have lost any trust that they once had and now communicate their rules in ways that do not guide students but rather condemn them, sending messages of distrust. This situation clearly becomes one of teachers' moral agencies operating as a critical and powerful judge rather than a caring actor who plays an important role in the unique teacher-student relation. Thus, the distinction made here is that it is not the mere existence of classroom rules that prejudges students, but rather the motivation for expressing them; with that distinction in mind, I turn to these data to explore two specific examples.

The most common rules and regulations outlined on the first day of class often reflect problematic areas that teachers confront during a typical semester. In fact, a couple of the teachers in this study attempted to justify the existence of certain rules to their students by explaining that they had encountered problems in these areas with former students. At times, the teachers also specified consequences for students who break their rules. Two examples were found on the first day of class when Julio and Cathy each addressed the issues of attendance and homework, conveying, in my opinion as observer, messages of distrust.

First, Julio highlighted the importance of attendance with reference to the grades he assigned the previous semester, specifically the failing grades of students who cut class. One particular comment clearly implied that he expected individual members of this current group of students to cut class and to make excuses for their absences. To emphasize his point in class, he stated in English:

> People in my country have to go across mountains … at 300 meters on a cable and sit on a rope and swing across on a roller, ok? So I have very little pity for somebody telling me 'Oh, I couldn't make it because I overslept.'

His comment did not enlighten students to the recognized importance of class attendance and active student participation in SL learning or guide them in practices that would foster their learning. Rather, his comment revealed his expectation that a student would choose to cut class for an unacceptable reason (i.e., his distrust in students to attend class and do the right thing) and also detailed the consequences of their bad decision: he, as teacher, would not have pity on them.

A second message of distrust concerns students' homework. Cathy read every word of the syllabus to her students on the first day, emphasizing the rules for the course and interjecting additional, specific information throughout the document. About homework, Cathy told her students the follwing :

> I don't collect your homework every day. I'm going to ask you to do it so that you can go over it in class. And then, once in a while, I'm going to ask you all to turn it in or I'll come around and check it while you're working on something else…just to make sure that people are keeping up on it and that's going to be what determines your lab manual and homework 10%… And that's how I'm going to check it.

Certainly, her comment implies that she does not trust her students to do homework all the time, at least, not without her monitoring, and warns them that she plans to check up on their practices.

Additionally, Cathy kept track of students' participation during this first class by putting a mark next to their names in her grade book every time they spoke. She explained to them that this was how their participation grade would be determined. This high-level monitoring demonstrates the influence that Cathy's previous negative experiences have had on her expectations. Her interview confirmed this observation. She stated, the following:

> Because I've had these areas (Do I believe them [students]? Do I not believe them? …) To avoid it being a judgment call for me later on, I have added all these other things into my syllabus about requiring a note for absences, all that kind of stuff, so I think, you know, almost the first day is almost like an administrative class rather than a Spanish class.

It is worth noting that Cathy wanted to avoid having to judge situations as they arose, choosing instead to set up clear guidelines from the beginning of the term that addressed in detail the negative situations that she anticipated. To avoid playing the judge later, she made her rulings explicit prior to any offences.

Moreover, Cathy also believes it is necessary to specify the consequences for students who break these rules. In her second interview, Cathy criticized the departmental syllabus for including rules without detailing what happens when they are broken. She explained why she provides students with this information:

> I have an extra sheet . . . as far as absences, tardies, handing in assignments late, all that kind of stuff. You can't just say you'll be penalized, you have to say, I feel like, you have to say how you'll be penalized. I put that in.

Though none of the students' questionnaires showed any sign that they either interpreted these teachers' rules as prejudgments or were offended or surprised by them, several students' comments did reveal that teachers' expectations regarding attendance, participation, and homework were communicated. For example, one of Julio's students wrote, "He said we should attend class and it was expected of us." And, Cathy's student commented, "She explained to us all [she] expected, from class participation to in and out of class work."

Based on comments like these, it is tempting to claim that these teachers' expectations were clearly understood by their students as helpful guides, that no negative prejudgments were communicated, and that the stage was set for effective instruction. Indeed, all the students responded in the negative to question #8 ("Is there anything that you would like to have been different about today's class?"), none expressed negative reactions toward the first day of class or their teacher, and all of their comments regarding how they believed the course would unfold throughout the semester were basically positive. It could seem as if the issue of teachers prejudging students is a moot point.

Nevertheless, when one takes into account that these students had spent at least twelve years in an academic system in which their actions and words were constantly evaluated, their behavior was regularly monitored and judged, and they had likely faced consequences for certain actions, it is probable that they were already accustomed to teachers expressing certain negative expectations.[2] In fact, several of these students' comments reveal that they anticipated that their teachers would review the syllabus on the first day of class, outline their expectations, and emphasize the rules of the course.

For example, Roberto's students stated that, "It was what I expected. Explanation of the syllabus", "He went over the syllabus and [we] got to know what the professor expects," and "[The teacher's goal was] to foster an understanding of what the demands are and [what] we are expected to do." Similarly, one of Linda's students commented, "I think the first day is a good introduction on the course and what is expected from us." One of Julio's students wrote, "He said he wouldn't tolerate translator usage." A student of Cathy reported, "I think she just wanted to let us know what to expect in the next few weeks." Finally, Janet's student concluded, "She expects participation, attendance, and she made that pretty clear."

However, even without evidence of students' negative reactions, it is worth pausing to consider if messages of distrust, whether perceived by these students or

not, should be avoided on the first day of class. Noting that these students' comments were initial reactions and that some may not have been willing or even able to articulate their interpretations of teachers' messages, future exploration of the messages sent to students on the first day of class deserves teachers' consideration and researchers' attention. Moreover, as recommended by some researchers (Brown, 2009; Ewald, 2004), fostering organized classroom discussions with students on the rationale behind certain language learning practices and principles may help them recognize some of the rules teachers establish in SL courses as helpful guides rather than negative prejudgments.

Rules that Define a "Good Student": Hard, On-Time, and Honest Work

Since teachers enact classroom rules and regulations (and often present them to students prior to any infraction), it is logical that students are sometimes judged by teachers to be "good" or "bad" on the basis of their keeping the rules, a moral evaluation.

In this study, Cathy revealed one of her expectations of what it means to be a "good student." During her first class, Cathy frequently communicated the idea to her students that she expected them to work diligently. In her interview with me, she claimed that the "good kids" are those students who work hard while the others are "slackers." In this way, Cathy passed a positive moral judgment, "good," on the students whose actions align with her expectations and a negative one, "slackers," on the others.

Similarly, Roberto emphasized the timely completion of work in characteristic of a "good student." During his interview, he discussed his course rules regarding late work and explained his evaluation of a student who submits a paper on time, "If you're a good student [one who completes work on time] you shouldn't get the same grade as the other students." Though he did not explicitly address on-time work in class, he did appeal to the notion of equality after passing around an attendance list; this list took on a particularly moral significance when Roberto discussed the situation of students who arrive late. Implying that he expected students to arrive late (again, a moral issue in itself) he instructed his students to indicate on the list when they arrived late because "It's not fair to others who arrived on time." For Roberto, "good" students both submit work and arrive to class on time.

Julio and Janet did not use the term "good student" but implicitly referred to a notion inherent to being a "good" student in the traditionally moral sense, that of working with integrity and honesty. While Cathy read every word of the syllabus, including the university's official statement on academic honesty, Julio only briefly touched on the issue when he stated the following:

> Academic Honesty: Please don't cheat. Don't copy. Don't look like you're even looking at somebody else's paper. Okay? And do your own work. And we're fine. I've never had any problems with that but it's on here and we should, you know, cover that.

From his final comment, it seems that Julio felt a little uncomfortable with having addressed the issue of honesty because he tried to justify to the students why he mentioned the issue at all, perhaps not wanting to communicate that he expected them to cheat. Notice that, like Cathy, Julio also referred to past experiences ("I've never had any problems with that") but, unlike Cathy, he did so in a relatively positive light, perhaps inviting or encouraging students' compliance rather than expressing distrust.

Janet was even more soft-spoken about the issue. In class, she told her students, "Honesty. I don't think we have to go there. Just know that I do follow the standards and I hope you do, too." Her tone was not threatening but rather inviting, suggesting that while she expected their honesty, she was appealing to their sense of justice and fair play. While they did not explicitly connect the two issues, for Cathy, Julio, and Janet, honest completion of work is a clear indicator of a "good" student.

Though academic honesty, timely completion of assignments, on-time arrival to class, and hard work are not primarily "first-day" issues in that acts of academic dishonesty on the first day are unlikely, assignments are not yet due, and late arrivals on the first day are normally excused on the basis of finding new classrooms and settling in to the routine, it is likely that teachers begin to view students as "good" or "bad" students or at least begin to communicate their own definition of "good" and "bad" students on the first day of the semester. Therefore, any complete understanding of teachers' moral agency depends on the inclusion of issues that surface on the first day of class and continue throughout the academic term.

LIMITATIONS

As in every investigation, the findings of this study are tied to this particular context. These five language teachers and their students are individuals, each with their own unique backgrounds and characteristics. Nevertheless, as a group, they represent well the context in which they taught and studied. Different teachers and/or students, and even these same teachers and students in a different setting or time, would likely have produced different data. Moreover, the teachers' behaviors might have been influenced by my presence in their classrooms and by their knowledge that I was conducting a study on the first day of class. As pointed out by one anonymous reviewer, a future study might benefit from observing the first several days of class and other days throughout the semester and then analyze only the first day so that teachers would not be aware that the first day of class was the particular focus of the study.

The broader institutional context in which these teachers worked included, as previously mentioned, a departmental course syllabus they were expected to follow and an official statement regarding academic honesty they were required to enforce. These working conditions, including other institutional variables (such as departmental expectations, the university mission, physical classroom space,

etc.), along with the teachers' own personalities, professional identities and other personal characteristics, had, to a great extent, an unknown effect on their first day of class perspectives and behaviors. Certainly these important factors all had a significant impact but the specific influence of these factors on their particular first days of class are outside the scope of this study.

The findings of this study are based only on the data gathered. Other data collection instruments used to investigate the first day of class as well as data collected at a later point in the semester likely would have provided more information that would further enlighten the present analysis. For example, we do not know how these students and their teachers reacted in the long-term to the rules established on the first day nor do we know what effects, if any, were caused by ambiguous messages that might have been communicated to the students in the teachers' expression of the rules themselves. These issues warrant further research attention. Since university teachers often review the course syllabus on the first day of class, moral issues pertaining to classroom rules and regulations may carry more weight and are perhaps more easily noticed during this introductory meeting. Nevertheless, as previous research (Jackson et al., 1993; Johnston, 2003; Johnston et al., 1998) has documented, a teacher's moral agency, as manifested in the area of rules and regulations, continues to be present throughout an academic term.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Confirming the research of Jackson et al. (1993), Johnston (2003), and Johnston et al. (1998), in these data there is evidence of SL teachers' moral agency in that these teachers exercised their power and authority by establishing their preferences during the first class on a variety of issues including terms of address and the use of cell phones. They claimed that it was important to institute certain rules regarding, for example, attendance and homework, and they defined good and bad students by how hard students work, if their work is turned in on-time, and whether it conforms to standards of academic honesty. In the process, many of their specific classroom actions confirmed their beliefs. The teachers monitored students' behavior, words, and intentions, created specific consequences for breaking the moral code of the classroom, and prejudged the behaviors of students based on past negative experiences. I do not claim that these practices are necessarily unfounded but rather emphasize their moral nature.

Moreover, I am not at all suggesting that the SL classroom is immune to the need for a moral code of behavior. In fact, given its communicative goals, the SL classroom is a social context in which certain expectations should, and indeed must, be carefully set and respected by all parties in order for effective language learning to take place. Nevertheless, it seems prudent that the rules be established in such a way that students understand them clearly and do not perceive negative evaluations of themselves or their behavior before they even have a chance to function as players in the classroom. When SL teachers communicate rules, care

should be taken to assure, as much as possible, that these rules are all necessary for the language classroom and that they are framed and expressed as guides rather than as prejudgments. Moreover, as Sparks et al. (2004) found, though in this study the students did not express any initial negative reactions toward the teachers or confusion regarding their expectations, teachers should keep in mind the possibility that their messages are often ambiguous and can be interpreted by students in contradictory ways.

With the current and growing recognition of the course syllabus having the status of a legal contract, certainly SL teachers (and language course coordinators, department chairs, and administrators) feel the need to include all the rules that are relevant to the course and any corresponding consequences. This is particularly evident in the numerous recommendations given to TAs and new teachers concerning the necessity of establishing rules on the first day. Once we, as educators, have tasted the vulnerability of our position, we are understandably motivated to set things up in such a way that we protect ourselves. Often forgotten and potentially offended, however, are the multitudes of students who, enduring the "reading of the rules" multiple times, never intend to break any of them. Their time is wasted, their sense of relationship with their teachers stands to be jeopardized from the beginning of the course, and, at times, even their conduct or intentions are prejudged. Indeed, it is likely that only an individual teacher can truly know, with any level of certainty, whether she communicates her rules to students out of distrust or if those rules are motivated only by her care for students' learning and well-being. Administrative understanding, social sensitivity, and linguistic tact on the part of teachers and syllabus writers are all necessary ingredients for the careful establishment of course rules and regulations in a way that reaches toward a mutual understanding and acceptance – between teacher and students -- of these procedures.

Future Research

If Patrick et al. (2003) and others are correct and the first day of class is indeed a crucial event, surely it deserves significant research attention. Future studies should focus specifically on the range and number of rules that are presented by SL teachers on the first day of class. These include, but are certainly not limited to, tardiness, attendance, homework, specific classroom behaviors, participation expectations, and issues of academic honesty. These are all issues confronting, and confronted by, classroom teachers in most, if not all, academic disciplines.

One important issue of particular concern to SL teachers is that of the (sometimes) required exclusive use of the L2 in the second language classroom. Though surprisingly, given the expectation of their language department, only one teacher in the present study made significant references on the first day of class to requiring the exclusive use of the L2 , some SL teachers make it clear to students on the first day that the target language is the required language of the classroom (an issue that did not surface in the current data but could be the focus of future investigations exploring the first day of class). Certainly, a teacher's own use of the

L2 on the first day, especially when discussing rules and regulations in a language that students may not yet understand well, must also have an impact on students' perceptions of their teacher's authority and power, an issue of moral agency that greatly warrants future research attention. Furthermore, much is yet to be known regarding SL teachers' individual approaches to the first day including their teaching methodologies, practices, and concerns. And, teachers and researchers know very little about language students' reactions to the first day of class. Like Patrick et al. (2003), some future studies should be longitudinal in nature, focusing on the effects of SL teachers' approaches to the first day on students' language learning and perceptions.

While most teachers, including language teachers, intuitively know that the first day of class is tremendously important for both pedagogical and intrapersonal reasons, we are left mostly to ourselves to do what seems to us best in our own classes. Thus, we are in a position to benefit from well-grounded empirical research that can inform both our pedagogy and our practices and improve the experiences of our students.

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NOTES

[1] My institution's IRB would not allow students to complete the questionnaires during class time and, as a result, the questionnaires were not all returned. The questionnaires had been previously tagged so that they could be coordinated with their respective teacher. The 35 that were returned (from 78 total students) included students from each of the five classes.

[2] Moreover, one anonymous reviewer pointed out that the rule-setting transactions that take place on day one "are ritualistic – that is the way new courses start." The reviewer emphasized that "it may not be the case at all that students feel negatively about this."

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APPENDIX A: 1ST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (PRIOR TO FIRST DAY OF CLASS):

1. Do you have specific goals for the language students in your classes? If so, what are they? Do you have certain expectations for their performance and behavior? Explain.
2. How would you describe your language teaching methodology?
3. Describe a typical first day of class.
4. Is your approach to the first day of class different from other days? If so, in what way?
5. Are there specific goals that you try to accomplish on the first day?
6. How do you think students react to the first day of class?

APPENDIX B: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What previous language courses have you taken in college?
2. Is this your first class with this particular teacher?
3. Was this first class of the semester what you expected it to be like? Explain.
4. Was there anything the teacher said or did that … surprised you?, … encouraged you?, … discouraged you?, … worried you?, etc.
5. What do you believe were your teachers' goals for today's class?
6. What do you think this class will be like throughout the rest of the semester?
7. During this first class, did your teacher communicate any expectations regarding your behavior or performance. If so, what were they and how were they communicated?
8. Is there anything that you would like to have been different about today's class?

APPENDIX C: 2ND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (FOLLOWING THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS):

1. Do you think that this particular class session was typical for the first day in your classes? Why or why not?
2. Was there anything in class that surprised you?
3. Is there anything that you would change if you could do this class session over?
4. Did you accomplish the goals that you set out to accomplish? What were they? Did you communicate certain expectations regarding students' performance or behavior? Why or why not? If so, how did you communicate these expectations?
5. What do you believe were the students' reactions to this class?

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