1-27-1997

Non-Literate Students in Adult Beginning English as a Second Language Classrooms - A Case Study

Sandra Lynn Banke
Portland State University

THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Sandra Lynn Banke for the Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages were presented January 27, 1997, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

COMMITTEE APPROVALS:

[redacted]
Marjorie Terdal, Chair

[redacted]
Thomas Dieterich

[redacted]
Molly Williams

[redacted]
Mary Kinnick
Representative of the Office of Graduate Studies

DEPARTMENT APPROVAL:

[redacted]
Jeanette DeCarrico, Chair
Department of Applied Linguistics

****

ACCEPTED FOR PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY BY THE LIBRARY

by Lolita M Fisher on 26 February 1997

ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Sandra Lynn Banke for the Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages presented January 27, 1997.

Title: Non-Literate Students in Adult Beginning English as a Second Language Classrooms – A Case Study.

The development of literacy in English is facilitated by second language students' ability to read in their first language, particularly if that language employs a Roman alphabet. These students' literacy abilities may also influence their development of oral proficiency when their primary instructional environment is the classroom. Yet there have been few successful studies of non-literate students' progress, behaviors and learning preferences in classrooms with literate students. This is primarily because the transient nature of non-literate students' attendance in formal learning environments results in sample sizes too small for experimental research with reliable generalizations.

The purpose of the present study was to determine if, in the classroom environment, differences existed between literate and non-literate students not only in terms of gains in oral proficiency skills, but also in their short-term memory capability of newly learned material presented orally, the behaviors they exhibit in the classroom, and their preferences for particular classroom activities.

Six non-literate and eight literate students from a community college adult beginning ESL classroom participated in the study. All had little or no previous exposure to English and came from various cultural backgrounds. The students were given the BEST Oral Interview Short Form as a pre- and post-test, and an aural vocabulary quiz of newly learned material. Their behaviors in the classroom were observed at four different times, and they completed a questionnaire of their activity preferences.

The BEST scores indicate that the literate students made greater gains in oral proficiency than the non-literate students, which is consistent with previous research using that instrument. The results of the aural vocabulary test reveal no differences in the oral short-term memory capabilities of the students, indicating that both literate and non-literate students respond well to teacher-directed, controlled oral activities. This is consistent with the results of the activities preferences questionnaire, where non-literate students preferred controlled activities, while the literate students' responses showed no preference for any particular activity.

NON-LITERATE STUDENTS IN ADULT BEGINNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS -- A CASE STUDY

by

SANDRA LYNN BANKE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Portland State University
1997

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

Figures

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

Native language literacy, particularly if one's native language employs a Roman alphabet, would be advantageous when learning to read and write English. But does it also facilitate the development of oral proficiency? The converse of this question is the problem at the center of this research project: If students are not literate in their native language (L1), will this affect the rate of the student's oral proficiency development in L2? If no system of written, or perhaps even of phonetic, mental representation exists for non-literate beginning students of English as a Second Language (ESL), processing and remembering new linguistic information in English would take an entirely different turn. What strategies do they employ in the literate classroom setting which enable them to acquire language?

Rationale

A number of sources led to the consideration of this issue as a research problem, including theoretical considerations, practical experience and existing methodology in the beginning ESL classroom.

First, considering my own experience with low level and non-literate students as an ESL instructor at a local community college, a number of trends become apparent. Non-literate students usually spend the maximum number of allowable terms in the lowest level before moving on to languish in the next level. If they are promoted to the next level, because their needs are not being met, they frequently drop out of the program all together. Even in the lowest level, my colleagues observe that their

attendance is sporadic and their progress slow. Why should this be? One would assume that literacy, not oral, development would be affected by non-literacy. Instructors in these courses inadvertently assume a great deal of literacy knowledge on the part of the students, leading the non-literate student to frustration. Yet even in lessons where oral and listening skills are the focus, non-literate students in my classes performed more poorly than their literate counterparts, unable to repeat words and phrases in English or successfully perform aural review of previously learned material using pictures and actions.

The question of investigating the learning strategies of non-literate students becomes even more relevant when it is clear to the classroom instructors with whom I have spoken that the current practice of teaching literate and non-literate students in the same class is not effective. Different learning styles are present in any classroom. Given the variance in the literate and non-literate learners' educational backgrounds, different cognitive strategies are probably coming into play. This presents a strong argument for literate and non-literate tracks in ESL programs to maximize learning for both groups of students.

A study of the relationship between L1 literacy and L2 oral proficiency development, as well as an investigation of the learning preferences of non-literate students, is especially relevant when one considers that very few researchers have asked these questions. The non-specialist may remark that perhaps no such relationship exists; that is, that L1 non-literacy has no effect on L2 oral proficiency. After all, people learned multiple languages long before the development of writing systems. Yet in the

review of the literature, as outlined below, time and again those researchers that have attempted these questions remark that investigations into how non-literate students process language and their learning strategies in the classroom setting are continually overlooked. A possible explanation is the difficulty of doing good research with an inherently transient student population. Another is that this voiceless group of students drop out of ESL programs before their frustrations can be recognized and addressed.

Finally, in addition to practical experience and the paucity of published research on the relationship between non-literacy in L1 and oral development in L2, a review of literature on language learning theory prompted me to look further into this question.

First, in research among literate foreign language students in the United States, a relationship was found between students' difficulty in learning to read in their first language and their difficulty with the phonetic system of a foreign language. This Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991), is discussed in Chapter 2. Other research with young learners (Hudelson, 1987) found a positive relationship between L1 literacy and L2 acquisition. Finally, in terms of learning strategies, Heath (1986), Greenfield (1972) and Randhawa (1989) suggest that literacy includes the ability to talk about and objectify language, perceptions that may not exist in preliterate societies. When learning has been exclusively context-driven and field dependent, the decontextualized, field independent learning that is the nature of the classroom approach may be largely inappropriate for non-literate students.

In sum, my theoretical orientation is that native language literacy enhances second language learning, in particular the rate of oral proficiency development, in ways

other than just being able to write down new vocabulary. Literate individuals are aware of language as an object, which enables them to talk about letters, words and sentences as real objects they have seen. Because they are familiar with the orthographic system of their L1, literate individuals have the capacity to manipulate its phonology for the retention of vocabulary items, as well as to discriminate between segments of spoken speech for better oral repetition. Finally, by virtue of having had at least some formal education, literate students possess strategies that allow them to process the decontextualized language of the ESL classroom.

Definition of Terms

A number of terms have been employed concerning literacy, non-literacy and language learning that need explanation. What follows is a list of the most commonly used terms:

· ESL -- English as a Second Language; in this context, also the English language programs of community colleges and adult schools for immigrants and refugees.

· L1 -- the student's native language.

· L2 -- the target language, in this case English.

· preliterate -- students from societies with no tradition of written language (e.g. until recently, the Hmong) or from societies where literacy is not a common skill for the majority of the population (i.e. Haitian Creole speakers).

· illiterate -- students who cannot read or write but are from societies where literacy is common.

· functionally illiterate -- a term more widely used when discussing literacy in the United States, it generally refers to individuals with less than five years of formal education.

· semi-literate -- individuals who can read their language, but only for the most basic of tasks for everyday life; these individuals may have attended school for one or two years.

· non-literate -- all of the above; for the purposes of this study, includes individuals literate in L1 but not in a Roman alphabet language.

· TPR – Total Physical Response; a teaching technique in which students learn material and demonstrate understanding through actions; developed by Asher (1977).

Research Questions

At the outset of this study, three questions were asked:

1) Does non-literacy in L1 negatively affect the rate of oral proficiency development in L2 as compared to literate students? It was hypothesized that a student's inability to read in L1 negatively affects the rate of the student's oral proficiency development when compared to literate students, as measured by a) the points gained on two administrations of the Basic English Skills Test Oral Interview Short Form, and b) a listening/pictorial test of short term memory of new vocabulary material presented kinesthetically and pictorially.

2) What are the learning strategies and preferences of non-literate ESL students and how do they differ from those of literate students? It was hypothesized that the learning preferences of non-literate students would differ from those of literate students as measured by an oral interview as well as by a "time on task" observation instrument. Non-literate students would prefer the non-traditional language practice activities (i.e. TPR and other activities which involve movement) as opposed to the more communicative, uncontrolled pair and group work.

3) What kind of input do these students receive in the classroom and how do they respond to it? It was hypothesized that the non-literate students would receive less

input from the instructor, even though these students respond more frequently to "real-life" -based and procedural input than traditional instructional input, the former being most similar to their context-dependent learning preferences.

In the course of doing the research, however, it was necessary to make some changes to these guiding questions.

First, for the measurement of the students' oral proficiency development (question #1), it was discovered that some of the data from the class observations could also be used to describe how frequently the students used English in the classroom and how that use changed over the course of the term. This additional source of data provided another measurement of oral proficiency overlooked in the original proposal.

The classroom observation data, in conjunction with an interview, were to be used to describe the students' learning preferences (question #2). However, the oral interview proved to be impossible for logistical reasons. Unlike other studies of non-literate students, which looked at monolingual groups of learners, the subjects of this study represented five different language groups, for which five different translators would have had to be found. Again, because of the sporadic attendance of non-literate students, the cost involved would have outweighed the usefulness of the data gathered. Instead, a pictorial questionnaire was used to gather information about the students' preferred classroom activities.

Finally, question #3 was to describe the type and frequency of input that the non-literate students receive from the instructor. This question was deleted from the study, because while the other data to be gathered focused on the student, this question

concerned itself only with the instructor. This seemed incongruent with the aim of research concerned with describing the progress and behaviors of students. Therefore, the question was changed to focus on how the classroom behaviors of non-literate students differ from those of their literate counterparts for different types of activities.

Taking the above modifications to the study into account, the hypotheses now read as follows:

Hypothesis #1

A student's inability to read in L1 negatively affects the rate of the student's L2 oral proficiency development in the classroom compared to literate students, as measured by a) the points gained on two administrations of the Basic English Skills Test Oral Interview Short Form, b) a listening/pictorial test of short term memory of new vocabulary material presented both kinesthetically and pictorially, and c) class observation data which includes a record of how frequently a student spoke English in a given 20-minute period and how that frequency changed over the course of the term.

Hypothesis #2

The learning preferences of non-literate students will differ from those of literate students as measured by a) a classroom observation instrument recording the frequency of student behaviors over a 20-minute period for a variety of activities, and b) a pictorial questionnaire of the students' attitudes toward structured (teacher-led) and less structured (communicative pair and group work) activities.

Hypothesis #3

The type and frequency of classroom behaviors demonstrated by non-literate students in the ESL classroom will differ from those exhibited by literate students for different activities as measured by the aforementioned classroom observation instrument.

In sum, based on past research on the effect of native language literacy on the acquisition of a second language, adult second language learners who are not literate in their first language will make slower progress in the development of their oral proficiency than will their literate counterparts in the classroom setting. Literate L2 learners have the ability to make more efficient use of the L2 input they receive, are accustomed to talking about language (metalinguistic skills) and possess the phonetic coding skills of their L1 to represent new vocabulary and structures from L2. Non-literate students, in addition to not being able to make efficient use of these skills, are also more accustomed to learning in a context driven environment. Hence, literate and non-literate students will have very different learning strategies in the classroom setting.

Overview of the Method

A causal/comparative case study was implemented employing several data-gathering techniques to assess the relationship between native language literacy and the acquisition of oral proficiency. The case study format was chosen a) to provide triangulation for the results of the guiding questions and their instruments, and b) to provide enough data upon which to base a study, given the transient nature of non-

literate students in ESL programs. By gathering data from a number of different sources, conclusions could still be drawn despite a student's presence or absence for any one part of the study.

Design

The dependent variable in this study is the students' rate of oral language proficiency development as measured by the short form of the Basic English Skills Test (BEST), a widely used language proficiency test at community colleges for placement in ESL programs on the basis of its proven internal validity. The administration of the test is outlined below in Chapter 3. The type of data gathered with the BEST could be described as interval data in that the scores serve as points of comparison for the students' oral proficiency. The scores for literate and non-literate students were statistically compared using a t-test for independent groups.

Several independent variables were also measured.

- A comparison of literate and non-literate students' **verbal short term memory** for vocabulary items was conducted using a researcher designed pictorial and action-based vocabulary lesson administered by the instructor. A measurement of the students' retention of the material was administered immediately after the lesson.
- To discover the differences in the **students' learning strategies**, classroom observations of student behaviors were conducted, and a pictorial questionnaire of student preferences of classroom activities was administered, both by the researcher.

· Finally, to measure the **classroom environment**, observations of several class sessions were conducted using a time on task observation instrument, in which student behaviors were assessed for a short time period.

Subjects

This study focused on the beginning adult ESL student population, both literate and non-literate, of a local community college. Only the ESL program's beginning level students were studied, as students already somewhat proficient in English could skew the scoring and comparison of oral proficiency development. The college's ESL student population consists of refugees and immigrants from all corners of the globe, who are generally underemployed and hold low income, entry-level jobs, if any.

Because this was a convenience sample and because the college's student population changes each term, the non-literate subjects of the study consisted of all the non-literate students in the beginning level class. The researcher relied on instructor judgment of student literacy level. The literate subject group consisted of seven students from the class. Because of circumstances involving location, time of day, and student participation, the sample size of non-literate students was extremely small ($n = 5$) for most parts of the study.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the field of second language acquisition research, a great deal of work has been done concerning the effect of the language learner's native language on subsequent English language acquisition. Contrastive analysis deals exclusively with this issue, as well as certain aspects of interlanguage theory.

Yet what of the effects of native language literacy on second language learning? Are the cognitive skills necessary for learning to read in one's native language necessary for the learning of a second language? Rivera (1990) and Wrigley and Guth (1992) concur that these skills are in some way transferable when one is developing literacy skills in a second language. Hudelson (1987) argues as well for the teaching of native language literacy to young children to aid the development of their literacy skills in English.

However, most studies, including those cited above, assume native language literacy on the part of the learner. Investigations into how the inability to read in one's native language affects the acquisition of oral language in adults have been few. Burtoff (1985) and Shank (1986) note that much of the second language acquisition research does not consider the special circumstances of the non-literate completely unfamiliar with written representations of language as well as with the metalinguistic skills necessary in language learning. Increasing numbers of non-literate students experience difficulties when they are placed in beginning English as a Second Language (ESL)

classes with their literate counterparts. For this reason, both qualitative and quantitative research is essential to more fully understand these students' special characteristics, their learning strategies and the differences in their rate of oral language acquisition.

Though little research has been done investigating the relationship between native language non-literacy and difficulties in the second language classroom, related studies do attempt to identify the advantages of native language literacy on language learning, from which inferences can be made about the non-literate students' learning processes. This research can be broken down into 1) the types of non-literacy and the characteristics of the non-literate individual, 2) theoretical considerations on the relationship between native language problems and foreign language learning difficulties, and 3) the actual studies on the effects of native language (L1) literacy on second language (L2) development.

Types of Non-Literacy and the Non-Literate Individual

Popular opinion in the US would identify as illiterate the individual with little formal schooling who has difficulty with reading beyond the most basic level. Indeed, functional illiteracy, or semi-literacy, is defined by Randhawa (1989) as having less than five years of formal schooling. But this definition becomes inadequate when one considers the range of non-literate students that ESL instructors face on a regular basis.

The California State Department of Education (CSDE) report on non-literate adults (1981) identifies three types of non-literate groups, including the semi-literate. Illiterate individuals come from societies where literacy skills are common but who, for a variety of reasons, have not learned to read or write. These individuals are aware that

language can be expressed two-dimensionally, however, and perhaps can recognize the shapes of words. Preliterate individuals come from societies with no written tradition of their language. Not only may they be unaware that language and meaning can be represented two-dimensionally, but may be equally as unfamiliar with line drawings which represent objects. Most have no concept of the classroom as a place of learning. Finally, semi-literate individuals, though possessing to a certain degree the ability to read their native language, can use this literacy only in the most basic, limited contexts, similar to the functionally illiterate mentioned above.

Lado (1990) and Shank (1986) further discuss the practical implications of non-literacy in the language classroom. Many non-literate students are unfamiliar with the metalingusitic skill of talking about language, and are confused by terms such as "letter," "word" and "sentence," terms that instructors routinely use in the first class. They have difficulty recalling newly taught material and applying it to different contexts (Lado, 1990). Their lack of classroom experience and the corresponding behaviors leads to frustration in the classroom; e.g., they may busily copy down the "meaningless" (to them) symbols on the chalkboard instead of concentrating on the oral language of the classroom (Klassen, 1991). Finally, Shank (1986), touching on Stephen Krashen's, and others', interpretation of Piaget's "formal operations theory," implies that skills such as thinking abstractly about language, grouping bits of linguistic information and applying formal operations to language are all associated with literacy and industrialized cultures, and that perhaps these skills may be completely non-existent in preliterate societies.

Two other studies from different contexts shed new light on assumptions

educators may have about their non-literate ESL students. Both the Latino students interviewed by Klassen and Burnaby (1993) and the Hmong women of Long's (1992) paper reported putting a greater emphasis on learning to read in their native language first, rather than in English, if at all. Not only do the literacy skills in Spanish allow the Latino students to use a bilingual dictionary, but they also have more uses for these skills, such as writing letters home, reading a Spanish Bible and following religious services conducted in Spanish (Klassen & Burnaby, 1993). Similarly, Long (1992) discovers that Hmong women in the Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand place the greatest importance on Hmong literacy, since it is their responsibility to maintain cultural ties and traditions. Like the Latino students, one of their primary uses of literacy is to write letters to relatives in Hmong. Some generations of Hmong may even resist literacy in English as it leads to greater independence of the young and thus a breakdown of the hierarchy of the traditional home and family life.

The question of whether non-literacy influences cultural attitudes toward language, as well as academic intellectual skills associated with literacy, are issues addressed by Greenfield (1972), Heath (1986) and Randhawa (1989). These larger, theoretical issues may be helpful in understanding the non-literate student's experience, and oftentimes, failure, in the traditional language classroom.

The Greenfield (1972) study of cognitive development in oral and written societies, though dated, proves quite relevant in the study of non-literate students' learning strategies. She argues that in oral cultures, in which both preliterate and illiterate individuals could be included, education is entirely context-driven. By

extension, interpersonal communication is also highly dependent upon the surrounding environment. Hence, when required to perform "conceptual and linguistic abstractions" (p. 172), the individual has difficulty. It can be inferred that talking about language in the decontextualized environment of the classroom may be completely overwhelming for the student from an oral culture.

Heath (1986) continues this discussion of cultural differences in attitudes toward language. She finds that how the people of a preliterate culture talk about language and view literacy may influence their language learning. Individuals unused to the "objectification" of language in the classroom, where the focus is always to a certain extent on the form rather than the meaning of utterances regardless of method, may not be successful in learning language in this setting. Additionally, as mentioned above, different perceptions may also exist for the non-literate learner in the interpretation of line drawings, illustrations often used in the classroom.

The article by Randhawa (1989) provides a succinct conclusion to the practical implications of non-literacy in the language classroom. Though primarily concerned with various types of literacy and the cognitive implications of literacy, Randhawa gets to the root of the difficulties of non-literate students with language learning. Citing an earlier article, the author explains that literacy, more than being able to read, includes the aforementioned ability to "objectify" language, the ability to distinguish between a text (or picture) and its interpretation, and the capacity to talk about texts and language as tools. These are precisely the skills that the literate student employs in the L2 classroom. On the other hand, the non-literate has often learned new skills in context, by

demonstration, by doing, or with tangible tools.

In short, these two groups work from completely different learning paradigms. This, perhaps, is at the crux of the difficulties non-literate students have in acquiring a second language in the classroom. The abstract and complex manipulation of language in a formal setting sets up obstacles for the non-literate student to acquire even oral language. These obstacles then only exacerbate the effects varying attitudes toward language and the lack of the other cognitive skills have on their language learning.

Theoretical Considerations on the Relationship between Native and Foreign Language Learning Difficulties

Memory research concerned with both good and poor readers, as well as studies searching for the reasons behind foreign language learning difficulties in literate students, also support the hypothesis that L2 oral development may be slower for non-literate students than for literate students. Whereas the previous section dealt primarily with studies on the environmental obstacles to language learning, the studies summarized below concern themselves with issues more cognitive in nature.

In a test of verbal short term memory in children, Smith, Mann and Shankweiler (1986) found that poor readers perform less well than good readers on tests in which the subjects are required to repeat recorded word strings. The results of this study, according to the researchers, correspond to literature in the field that claims poor readers' memory for linguistic material is "less efficient" than that of good readers (p. 629). Perhaps poor readers, having less experience with manipulating verbal material successfully, also have difficulty "objectively" manipulating spoken language. Though

this study is concerned with monolingual children, it could also be applied to non-literate L2 students. These individuals, lacking exposure to "objectified" and complex verbal and written material, have not developed the linguistic processing capabilities necessary for the comparatively complex process of oral language learning in the classroom environment.

Sparks and Ganschow (1991, 1993a, 1993b) take the results of the Smith, et al. (1986) study one step further to formulate a similar theory on the nature of foreign language learning difficulties. Their Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis (LCDH) asserts that students who have problems learning to process the "phonological code" of their native language, as in learning to read, will also have difficulties learning a foreign language. If, while learning to read and write, the students have difficulty with the phonological coding and phoneme segmentation of their native language, these students will not only have problems in learning to read a foreign language, but also in learning to distinguish between sounds and words in the processing of oral material in the foreign language. The authors assert that only one other study by Dinklage (1971), has considered native language literacy problems as causing difficulties in foreign language learning.

Extending this hypothesis to non-literate students in second language classrooms, particularly where a communicative approach is used, one should note that these students, never having processed written material, have limited access to their native language's phonological code. Unfamiliar with the concepts of "letters," "word" and "sentences" in their own language, they may have difficulty perceiving distinct phonemes

and segments in L2.

To conclude this section, the lack of literacy skills appears to influence not only the preferred learning environment of the non-literate student (i.e. contextualized vs. decontextualized), but also the way in which they process spoken language in L2 as well.

Studies on the Effects of Native Language Literacy on L2 Acquisition

In spite of the benefits native language literacy is thought to have on second language acquisition, few studies have been conducted which systematically investigate its relationship to oral proficiency development in non-literate adults. The primary reason for this is that this population of ESL students is inherently transient in nature. The demands of work and family, plus frustration in the classroom, force them to drop out of programs before an assessment of how much they have learned can be conducted (Lado, 1990), making systematic research problematic. Yet such research investigating the relationship between L1 non-literacy and progress in English is crucial if the needs of this substantial and disadvantaged population are to be addressed.

The four studies outlined below attempt such an investigation in three different venues. Hudelson (1987) investigates native language literacy and progress in English in the elementary school setting, which has the advantage of a stable subject pool. Klassen (1991) pursues the ethnographic route with non-literate Latinos, discovering how they feel their inability to read affects their access to effective language learning. Finally, Burtoff (1985) and Robson (1982) attempt quasi-experimental studies comparing the real effects of native language literacy instruction on two groups of Haitian Creole speakers and four groups of Hmong speakers, respectively, as measured by the Basic

English Skills Test (BEST).

Drawing on her own experience as an ESL teacher at the elementary school level, Hudelson (1987) finds three tangible benefits of native language literacy before English language literacy instruction. Not only do the children experience the different purposes for reading and writing in their L1, such as writing letters, telling stories and sending invitations, they also become acquainted with the coding systems of their first language for predicting meaning in their reading. This success then positively influences their willingness to try reading in English, for which they now have resources to draw upon. Having the experience of successfully manipulating their own language encourages them in their learning of English. Finally, familiar with the basic phonetic coding system of their own language, Spanish, the children experiment with writing in English using their L1 knowledge. This then gives them the confidence to learn to write using the English phonetic system.

This study is relevant in that it shows the transferability of L1 literacy skills to L2 learning. Additionally, the familiarity with manipulating, "objectifying," and focusing on the form of language that comes with reading could possibly facilitate the complex manipulation of language that comes with learning English, including the encoding of the new language using the L1 phonology.

The frustrations of non-literate Latin American adults at their inability to encode and remember linguistic information in English are at the heart of Klassen's (1991) ethnographic study. If Hudelson's study recounts the positive effect of L1 literacy on L2 acquisition, Klassen's serves as the opposite as it shows the negative effect of L1 non-

literacy on L2 acquisition.

Klassen discusses the varying domains of language use, both accessible and inaccessible, to non-literate adult Latino students in Toronto, including ESL classrooms. She also describes the subjects' own perceptions of why formal language learning situations remain difficult for them.

The obstacles Klassen's informants describe in their attempt to learn English relate both to the characteristics of non-literate individuals and the theoretical considerations reviewed above. Most complain of being unfamiliar with the workings of the classroom, as well as of the process of how to learn in that environment. Both of these skills are by-products of education in one's native language that most ESL instructors take for granted. Many of the informants lack the concentration skills required of them or make inefficient use of class time. For example, they copy the "meaningless" written symbols on the chalkboard instead of focusing on the classroom's oral language. Some admit dropping out of ESL classes when the teacher begins talking about items of which they have no concept, i.e. letters, words and sentences.

What comes through more than anything else, however, is their frustration at not being able to encode new information in English, a direct result of their inability to read Spanish. One complains of her inability to note or remember language learned with audiotapes. Many speak of the usefulness of Spanish literacy for using a dictionary or for learning new vocabulary. Lacking familiarity with the phonetic coding of Spanish, the informants "are kept from learning because they do not have the mother-tongue tools for accessing English" (Klassen, 1991, p. 10).

In sum, not only does the assumption of literacy on the part of the instructor prevent the informants from effectively learning English, but also their unfamiliarity with the norms of the culture of literacy which enhance language learning, e.g. metalinguistic skills, classroom behavior and expectations, and the graphophonic encoding skills that come with literacy. This study proves invaluable to instructors of low-level ESL classes, as it makes clear, from the mouths of the students, why, even with non-text based materials, non-literate students may fail to learn in their classrooms.

The discovery of the extent that L1 literacy skills and/or previous formal education influence the rate of L2 acquisition was the purpose of two quasi-experimental studies conducted in the early to mid-eighties of two large groups of students: Robson's (1982) study of the Hmong refugees in the Ban Vinai refugee camp in northern Thailand and Burtoff's (1985) study of the non-literate Haitian Creole speaking population in New York City, respectively. These studies are relevant to this project as they seek to measure the rate of oral proficiency with L1 literacy as the independent variable, but, more importantly, they also illustrate the problems of doing systematic, experimental research even with large pools of non-literate students.

Based on experience and prior research, Burtoff finds that non-literate students, even in classrooms which do not assume literacy skills, perform less well than literate students. She and others attribute this to the "cognitive consequences" (p. 1) of literacy, which include memorization capabilities, organizational skills and the ability to repeat utterances accurately (see, for example, Smith, et al., 1986). Hence, one of the primary goals of her study was to discover if native language literacy instruction, prior to ESL

instruction, results in greater proficiency in English as compared to students who receive ESL instruction only. She did this by measuring with the BEST assessment the progress of two groups, one which received 12 weeks of Haitian Creole literacy instruction as well as 12 weeks of ESL, and one which received 24 weeks of ESL instruction only. The BEST was chosen for its proven internal validity and reliability with low-level students, its assessment of various skill areas, as well as the ease of its administration.

In spite of careful planning, due to attrition, lack of interest and lack of control over the instruction, the study's sample size (n=29) was too small to make any valid statistical comparisons. Though the overall results of the comparison tended to favor the ESL-only group, when broken down, the L1 literacy + ESL instruction group performed comparatively well for general ESL proficiency and gained literacy skills at a greater rate in spite of having only 12 weeks of English instruction. Again, though the sample size was too small to make any generalizations, Burtoff hypothesizes that learners who receive L1 literacy instruction in addition to English have the potential to attain "a comparable level of ESL proficiency in addition to better literacy skills" (p. 14) when compared with those who receive ESL instruction only for the same time period.

Similarly, the aim of the Robson (1982) study was to discover if literacy in the Romanized version of Hmong (spoken by a tribal mountain people of Laos) significantly affects the acquisition of spoken and written English in a three-month ESL program at the Ban Vinai refugee camp in northern Thailand. Unlike the Burtoff study, Robson's study investigates the effect of a second variable, that is, previous formal education in Laos.

All participants in the study had no prior experience with English; therefore, only the results of a post-test were used to compare gains made by the four groups studied, e.g. students not literate in Hmong and with no prior schooling, students not literate in Hmong but with prior schooling, literate students in Hmong with no prior schooling, and students both literate in Hmong and with prior schooling. The Ann and Ben Listening Test, developed by the Oregon Indochinese Refugee Program, was administered to measure proficiency in English comprehension, and, in an adaptation, English literacy. The test items consist of sets of pictures, one of which the student must cross out in response to a verbal, or printed, cue. Robson chose this test as the pictures, simple line drawings, are taught in the native language prior to the test administration in English. The John Test, also developed by the Oregon Indochinese Refugee Program, was used to measure production in English of items specifically taught in the ESL program.

The results of the comparison, as in the Burtoff study, show that native language literacy and education "significantly increase scores" when compared with the scores of the non-literate students on the ESL tests (Robson, 1982, p. 211). In fact, it appears that the non-literate students made very little progress in any of the skill areas after the three-month program. However, looking more closely at the results of the two literate groups, Robson finds that the lack of experience with the classroom environment did not significantly lower the scores of that group of literate students with no previous formal education. This leads Robson to suggest that lack of literacy skills acts as a bigger hurdle to second language acquisition than the lack of familiarity with the classroom environment.

It must be borne in mind, however, that these findings "apply only to the effects of literacy and education on attempts to learn English in a formal classroom environment" (Robson, 1982, p. 213), and that language acquisition takes place outside of the classroom as well. The researcher of the present project asks the reader to keep both statements in mind while reviewing the present study.

In addition to their results, the Burtoff and Robson studies are relevant to this project in that they clearly illustrate the problems of doing statistically significant research using non-literate subjects. Though drawing on a large New York City Haitian population, of the 90 students found eligible for the study, less than a third actually participated until its end, making the project only quasi-experimental. Similarly, though 114 students were identified as suitable for the Robson study, 52 had dropped out of the ESL program before its completion. With this limitation in mind, a case study approach was chosen for the present project.

Summary

In sum, although little research has been done linking non-literacy in the student's native language with the acquisition of oral proficiency skills in L2, as the present study attempts to do, the related studies of 1) the characteristics and cultural attitudes toward language demonstrated by non-literate adult students of English, 2) foreign language learning difficulties by literate students as well as 3) those studies linking L1 and L2 literacy, all support the consideration of this question as an important research problem. Most of the research agrees that the cognitive skills, including phonological coding strategies, involved in learning to read one's native language are transferable to learning a

second language, though the extent of the effects of a non-Roman alphabetic L1 on this process is unclear (Shank, 1986). The research also shows that the learning backgrounds of non-literate students, in general context-driven, are not congruent with the decontextualized nature of formal language learning, even when non-text materials are used. The results of the present study examining the different learning preferences of literate and non-literate adult ESL students, as well as the effect of L1 non-literacy on L2 oral development, contribute to the research reviewed here and can be of practical use for classroom teachers.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The effects of native language non-literacy on the development of oral proficiency in English in the classroom setting are varied and complex. In retrospect, one effect is clear, however, and that is non-literacy's effect on students' attendance in class, or lack there of. For this reason, a causal/comparative case study has been implemented, in which several data-gathering techniques were used to assess the variables thought to be affected by native language non-literacy. In this way, informative data could be collected on the literate and non-literate groups and yet remain unaffected by the transient nature of the non-literate ESL student population and, hence, small sample size.

Subjects and Recruitment

The subjects of this study were both the literate and non-literate adult beginning ESL students at a local community college. Determinations of literacy were made on the basis of their performance on the first administration of the BEST, which requires the interviewees to spell their names, in addition to the justifications below. The students were registered and attending a single class, observed over one term, or approximately two and a half months. Because the class was in the early afternoon, most of the students were older adults and/or unemployed. Most of the students were also recent immigrants to the United States with little or no previous knowledge of English.

The pool of non-literate subjects consisted of six students with varying degrees of literacy experience in their native language. Student #1 (S1) is a retired man from Saudi Arabia with very low literacy skills. He was not observed to write in Arabic. Student #2 (S2), a middle-aged Eastern European man, was also not observed to have written anything in his native language. He was assumed to be semi-literate because he was observed to write his name and basic personal information, although with great difficulty. Student #3 (S3), a middle-aged, native Spanish speaker, is also assumed to have been semi-literate, as he had the concept of writing left to right and mentioned that he had had limited schooling in his country. Additionally, though observed to be writing something during class, he had been targeted by the instructor to have literacy problems. Student #4 (S4) is an older Jordanian woman who, like S1, demonstrated very low literacy skills. She was not observed to make any kind of written notation. Student #5 (S5), a Korean woman in her 50s, although a long time resident of the U.S., was also included in the sample as the instructor indicated that the student had low oral skills as well as literacy needs in English. She had repeated this level several times with little apparent progress. Finally, Student #6 (S6) is a young man from Guatemala whose native language is of Mayan origin, though he also spoke Spanish. He was also thought to be semi-literate on the basis of the present and subsequent instructors commenting on his persisting struggle with literacy.

All the subjects in the non-literate group (with the exception of S6) are in the same general age group, thus possibly discounting concerns about varying affective

factors related to age that might influence the development of their oral proficiency in English.

The literate students in the class, in general, tended to be younger than the non-literate students. However, the literate students chosen for the case study as the independent group paralleled the non-literate subjects in terms of age and occupation: upper 50s or retired and unemployed. All were literate in their native language and were observed to have little or no trouble reading and writing in English as appropriate to a low-beginning level class. The students were primarily Russian-speakers, with the exception of one Farsi (Persian) and two Arabic speakers. Because this group generally behaved and reacted in a similar manner to the class material and demonstrated similar results on the instruments used, throughout this study, they will be referred to, for the most part, as a group and not on an individual basis.

Because the students targeted for this study came from several different language groups, a basic, effective, yet cost efficient method of recruitment was necessary. It was impossible to predict which language groups would be represented before the term began; therefore, the subject permission form was translated into three of the languages usually present in each class: Vietnamese, Spanish and Russian. In this way, particularly with the Vietnamese and Spanish-speaking students, the permission form could be read by the literate students to the non-literate students.

On the first day of the second week of class, the researcher visited the class and made a short and simplified presentation to the class about the study. Then the permission forms were passed out and either signed, or not, by the students. As it turned

out, there were several students whose native language was not one of those into which the form had been translated. In this case, those languages were Arabic and Chinese. (Korean and Farsi also were not represented, but these students indicated that they had understood enough in English to grant their consent.) Two students from higher level ESL classes, who spoke Arabic and Chinese, respectively, were called upon to explain orally the consent form to the beginning level ESL students who spoke those languages. As was hoped, most of the students consented to be part of the study. Their consent forms are on file.

The same instructor taught this course the two terms in which the pilot study and the actual research were conducted. She had taught this beginning level for several terms, and the proceedings of her classes were consistent. Her heightened awareness of the literacy needs of her students demonstrated itself in activities from which all students could benefit, regardless of literacy level. She allowed the researcher great latitude while carrying out the study, yet did not let the researcher's activities interrupt the flow of her lesson.

Data Collection

The data of this case study were collected over a period of two and a half months, or one academic term, in a local community college's ESL program. The instruments employed include the Basic English Skills Test, or BEST, Oral Interview Short Form (owned by the college), a researcher-designed vocabulary test of recently learned oral material, a time-on-task observation instrument for in-class activity, and a post-class learning preferences questionnaire. The results of each set of data, that is, for

the literate and non-literate groups, were then compared to discover any meaningful differences.

BEST Oral Interview Short Form

The BEST was developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics to measure English skills in a competency-based format. The Oral Interview Short Form is especially intended to give the administrator an idea of the learner's level of oral proficiency, regardless of literacy level. The short form itself takes approximately 5-7 minutes and covers questions ranging from personal information to picture descriptions of various jobs. The elicited answers are scored either for comprehensibility, fluency or grammaticality, subject to the administrator's impressions.

Once the tests are scored, the results are usually converted into Student Performance Levels (SPLs). An SPL of 7 indicates that the student can converse on familiar topics with a native speaker with limited experience with non-native speakers. SPL of 0 indicates no skill whatsoever. Because the subjects of this study were all beginners, with improvement measurable by whole SPLs unlikely, only the raw scores were used to measure the progress and compare the two subject groups.

The test was administered twice, at the beginning and end of the ten-week term, for a total of two administrations. The students were called out of class and given the test by the researcher at two desks placed just outside the classroom door. This location was chosen both for its convenience to the classroom and to lessen the anxiety of the students by having the regular classroom close by. The researcher sat to the left of the student during the test administrations; therefore the test approximated a conversation.

In addition to its primary function of giving a numerical score to the students' progress in oral proficiency, the first administration of the BEST allowed the researcher to determine which of the students who volunteered for the study were appropriate subjects. Students whose oral proficiency scores were too high were omitted from the study. These types of students include, for example, Latin American immigrants who have been working and have learned street English on the job.

Vocabulary/Short-Term Memory Tests

The researcher-designed vocabulary lesson and test were intended to determine if the short-term memory for newly-acquired material differed between literate and non-literate students. The material to be learned needed to be of familiar objects, in order to motivate learning, yet challenging enough to encourage effort on the part of the students. The material for the lesson was not developed until about a week before the presentation. In this way, the material fit into the instructor's plan for that week.

The lesson and listening test were piloted by the researcher using single vocabulary items about places in the community. Because almost all students scored 100% on the listening test, including three out of the five students classified as non-literate, the researcher concluded that the material had been over-taught, as well as perhaps already familiar to some of the students prior to the lesson. Therefore, for the actual study, the material was changed from single vocabulary items to vocabulary items within sentences.

The vocabulary lesson focused on words and phrases connected with the repair of a house using duplicable materials from Sharon Bassano's First Class Reader! The

material was first presented orally and visually. The instructor presented pictures of the material to be learned on an overhead transparency, a paper copy of which was distributed to each student in the class. The material, a series of nine pictures of a man repairing a house, was presented orally. The teacher presented a sentence for each picture, repeating all the previous sentences after each new one was introduced. The students then chorally repeated the material after the instructor in the manner of a cumulative nursery rhyme (e.g. "The House that Jack Built"). In this way, the non-literate students would not be distracted by written representations of the material.

Comprehension of the material was checked through aural and oral quizzing. The instructor would call out the learned sentences, and the students would point to the pictured object on their handout. In another variation, the students hold up a number corresponding to the item on the page. Finally, for free practice, the students were to cut out the pictures and conduct a type of "picture dictation,": in which a student would dictate the order of the pictures, placed at random on a grid, to another student. Whether a student made errors during this practice time was not of concern to the researcher. In fact, students working together in this way often correct each other, which is often used as a practice technique in adult classrooms. The presentation and practice took approximately 45 minutes.

The listening test covered comprehension of all nine target sentences presented. For each sentence said by the instructor, the student was to choose from a set of four pictures and cross out the picture corresponding to the oral cue (as in the Ann and Ben Listening Test, developed for the Oregon Indochinese Refugee Project.)

Observations

To record classroom behavior and responses to activities, a time-on-task coding system was implemented. This instrument was used to compare non-literate students with their literate counterparts because it was effective and provided quantifiable data in spite of the low number of subjects. See Table 1 for an explanation of the codes.

Table 1

Explanation of Codes Used During Classroom Observations

Code	Definition
A	Attentive. Student appears to be listening, tuned in to and interested in the class proceedings, but not actively participating when some type of response is an integral part of the activity.
I	Inattentive. Behavior such as rummaging through their belongings, drawing, staring off into space or focusing attention on something other than the task at hand.
P	Participating. Taking part in and responding to the class activity as appropriate to the activity, e.g. pointing to a picture as a response to an oral cue, or functioning in a small group activity.
W	Writing. Making any kind of notation while attentive to the class proceedings.
S*	Speaking English. Includes speaking English as part of the exercise or activity, answering a question from the teacher and talking with another student
S#	Speaking native language.

During the term, four class sessions were observed for a span of 20 minutes each to record the students' behavior in response to different types of activities and materials. The researcher observed each student participating in the study approximately 1-1 ½ times per minute and scored the observed behavior. Because the instructor usually directed the same sequence of activities each class period, the observations were made

during the first ninety minutes of class. In this way, activities which may have elicited unexpected or unusual behaviors on the part of the students were avoided.

During each observation session, the researcher sat in the back of the room. This was done not only to minimize the "observer's paradox," in which students behave in non-characteristic ways because they are being observed, but also because most of the non-literate subjects usually sat, perhaps characteristically, toward the back of the room. Behaviors were recorded, as well as the general type of activity and topics being presented, on a plain notebook paper table. See Appendix A for a sample.

Learning Preferences

A researcher-developed evaluation visually illustrating the instructional activities observed in the classroom was used to discover whether there existed any differences between the learning activity preferences of literate and non-literate learners. The pictures included pictorial representations of writing, listening, pair work, group work, whole class activities, as well as of getting individual help from the teacher, grammar and pronunciation exercises. The students were asked to check a box if they liked the activity (a smiling face -- ☺), disliked the activity (a frowning face -- ☹), or had no opinion (a neutral face -- 😐). In this way, both literate and non-literate students could give feedback on their preferences of classroom activities. This form was administered to the students at the end of the term while the instructor was out of the classroom.

Limitations

As mentioned earlier, the sporadic nature of non-literate students' attendance in ESL programs has made previous research in their issues problematic. This has

contributed to the first of the limitations of the present study – small sample size. Because their needs often are not met in a literate classroom, non-literate students often stop attending. In the case of this study, the already small original sample (n = 8) shrunk (to n = 6) by the end of the term. Additionally, not all six students participated in all parts of the study, so often the numerical data is based on information of five students.

Previous studies of non-literate ESL students also have been of monolingual groups of learners (Latino, Hmong, or Haitian Creole-speaking students). In all these cases, more informative and reliable data about their motivations and preferences could be elicited through individual interviews by a member of their cultural group. Because the subjects of the present study represent four different language groups and had sporadic attendance, individual interviews were logistically difficult and the types of data obtainable limited.

Finally, particularly in the Ban Vinai study of the Hmong, which was conducted in the camp in Thailand, prior education and experience with English outside of the classroom could be controlled. Since this study was conducted in the United States and in an area without extensive cultural community support for the some of the nationalities represented, there was no way to control for English language use outside of class.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The data collected for this study are primarily numerical and frequency data and are the results of four different sources: a standardized oral assessment, subjective class observations, a researcher-designed vocabulary quiz and a student evaluation of class activities. The data were examined quantitatively to see if differences of any statistical significance existed for the two groups, the results of which are presented below. However, because of the small sample size, the data also must be interpreted qualitatively with respect to the variances among the individuals in this case.

Individual instructors may find that the observations made about this case are also true for their own students. It is for this reason that the generalizations made from it may be relevant in other beginning adult ESL classrooms. Though the subjects of this study are individuals very different from each other, in some respects they also represent the typical community college ESL classroom, in which teachers routinely encounter a wide range of skill levels and literacy needs.

The results are presented and analyzed in the order in which they were collected. Discussion of the results in terms of hypotheses follows in Chapter 5.

In the tables, figures and discussion below, the individual non-literate students are referred to as S1, S2, etc. A brief description of each of the non-literate students can be found in Chapter 3. The individual literate students' identities have been coded with a single upper case letter.

BEST Results

The BEST Oral Interview Short Form test scores, for any given population, can range from 0, or no skill in English whatsoever, to 40, or proficient orally in social and work situations. It is an assessment that demonstrates high interrater reliability as well as face validity.

Table 2

Individual Raw Scores from BEST

Students	First Administration January 16	Second Administration March 4
Non-Literate		
S1	10	15
S2	4	7
S4	2	3
S5	20	19
S6	15	23
Literate		
N	18	20
A	11	20
A2	13	23
M	11	11
Y	8	17

Table 3

t-test for Paired Samples

Whole Class Administration	No. of Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation
First	10	11.2	5.673
Second	10	15.8	6.795

As can be seen in Table 3, the combined subject groups (n = 10) made measurable improvement in their oral proficiency in English. The standard deviation was quite high at the first administration, $s = 5.673$. This shows that the students are quite different from one another, which is not surprising given the particularly wide range of abilities present in low level classes. The even larger standard deviation at the second administration, $s = 6.795$, shows that the students became increasingly different from each other. From this it could be surmised that some students are responding to the instruction and making improvement, while others may be struggling to keep up.

Table 4

t-test for Independent Samples for the First Administration – January 16

Group	No. of Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of the Mean
Non-Literate	5	10.2	7.497	3.353
Literate	5	12.2	3.701	1.655

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances: P = 0.135

Table 5

t-test for Independent Samples for the Second Administration – March 4

Group	No. of Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of the Mean
Non-Literate	5	13.4	8.295	3.709
Literate	5	18.2	4.550	2.035

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances: P = 0.123

Because n = 5 for both the literate and non-literate groups, respectively, a t-test, which corrects for small sample sizes, was used to analyze the BEST scores from the first administration and second administrations of the assessment, which occurred two months later.

The extremely small sample size is reflected in the large value of the standard deviation and standard error of the means for both administrations of the BEST. Were a bell curve to be drawn, all students would fall within acceptable ranges (two standard deviations). Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, which tests the probability that the variances are similar for each group, yields a low probability that this is so for both the first administration (P = 0.135) and second administration (P = 0.123). Again, the extremely small sample size prevents any reliable assertions of statistical tendencies in the comparison of the oral proficiency improvement between the two groups.

However, the data yields significant information about the oral proficiency gains of the individual students in this case. Looking at the mean, or average score of each group, for the two administrations of the BEST, the literate students did indeed improve their oral proficiency (12.2 to 18.2 points) by a wider margin than the non-literate students (10.2 to 13.4 points). This occurred even though the literate students' initial scores were quite high. The high standard deviations for both groups, but especially for the non-literate group, reflect the wide variations in oral proficiency skill among students coming into the beginning level class. The non-literate students in this class tended to differ from each other more than the literate students differed from each other at the

beginning of the term. This skill gap widened as the term progressed, as reflected in the standard deviation at the end of the term. (See also Tables 4 and 5.)

This could also suggest that some of the non-literate students responded to and managed to keep up with the instruction more successfully than did the other non-literate students.

The high standard deviation for the combined groups also shows that the subjects were less a reliable representation of the larger beginning student population than they were a group of highly differentiated individuals, a common issue with small sample sizes. For example, although Middle Eastern culture is represented in both groups, those in the literate group were educated in Western-style institutions and had been professionals in their respective countries, and thus were less likely to miss class as a result of Ramadan, an Islamic holy observance which occurred during the study. However, S4, the older Jordanian woman, did miss a lot of class, presumably to because of this holy observance.

Observations

The purpose of the classroom observations was to determine if the behaviors of the non-literate students, in response to the classroom activities, differed in any way from those behaviors of the literate students. The behaviors, encoded approximately once a minute per student, were classified by the researcher as attentive, inattentive, participating (as appropriate to the activity), writing, speaking English or speaking the native language (L1). See Chapter 3 for an explanation of these codes.

Because there were few instances when the students were inattentive, this category will not be discussed or included in the graphs except where it shows a marked change in behavior for an individual or group. Except where noteworthy, the code for when students were speaking their native language also has been omitted 1) because three of the subjects were the sole representatives of their L1 in the class, and hence had no opportunity to speak their native language, and 2) because of the few instances of when the other students spoke their respective L1 with the other students who also spoke it.

The results of the observations represent the largest chunk of data in this case study. For this reason, they are presented as follows. First, the average number of instances of each type of behavior for the whole term is discussed and compared for each group. Then, each observation day, referred to as Time 1, Time 2, etc., is presented with a summary of the classroom procedure for the time observed and a discussion of the literate and non-literate behaviors. Except where aberrations occur, the literate group is discussed as a single unit. The subjects of the non-literate group are discussed both at the group and individual level.

In the following tables, figures and discussion, where the code for the student is followed by an asterisk (e.g. N*), that means that the student was present for three out of the four observation periods. When the code is followed by a pound sign (e.g. H#), the student was present for two of the four observation periods. Also, students S2, S5 and H are the sole representatives of their native language in the class.

Averages of the Four Observations

With the exception of Time 2, all the portions of the class observed began with a type of whole class, teacher-fronted oral review or presentation, with some students calling out answers voluntarily. This was followed by either a pair or group activity with the intention of practicing the material in a semi-controlled manner. The pair or group practice was then followed by whole class oral review.

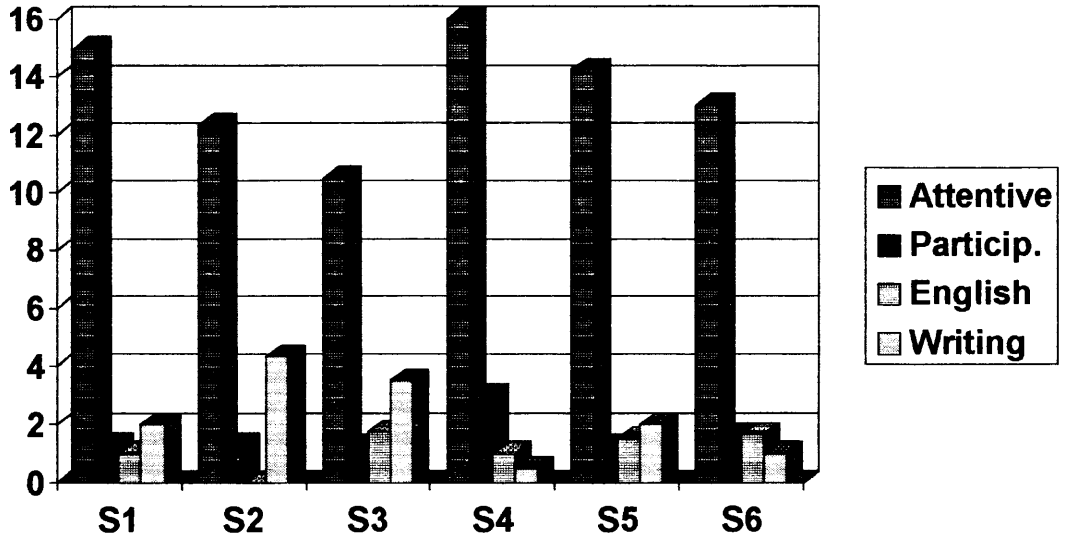

Figure 1 Individual Averages of Instances of Non-Literate Behaviors of Four Observations

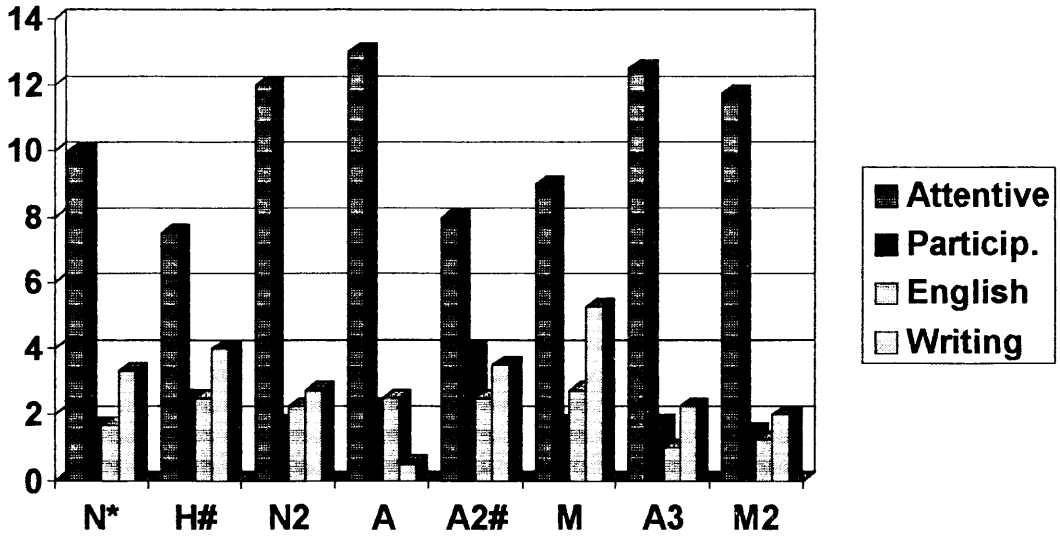

Figure 2 Individual Averages of Instances of Literate Behaviors of Four Observations

As illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, all students in both groups were attentive the majority of the time observed. This is consistent with the large amount of the observation time devoted to whole class presentation and review.

A few differences appear when the averages of the other behaviors are observed. When speaking and participation are viewed together, the average for the non-literate group is slightly lower than that of the literate group. Additionally, while the non-literate students are predominantly attentive but not participating, the literate students appear to do more different things with, and make more efficient use of, the class time, particularly the literate students H, M and A2.

The non-literate students S2 and S3 wrote far more than the rest of the non-literate group, who wrote minimally. As mentioned in Chapter 3, S2 and S3 were

identified as semi-literate with limited educational experience. What and why they wrote, instead of participating, is unclear. It is possible that as a result of their unfamiliarity with classroom procedures, these students copied down material, thinking it was expected of them, even though it possibly had no meaning to them.

Time 1 – January 25

This time period began with an oral, whole class review of vocabulary and phrases related to seasons. Some students called out answers, while others made written notes to themselves. This lasted approximately ten minutes. The instructor then began another ten minute group activity (information gap) to practice the vocabulary items.

Table 6

Instances of the Behaviors of the Non-literate Group at Time 1, January 25

Student	Attentive	Particip.	Inattentive	English	Native	Writing
S1	13	2	0	1	0	4
S2	9	4	0	2	n/a	7
S3	8	2	0	2	0	8
S4	16	4	0	0	0	0
S5	14	4	0	2	n/a	8
S6	13	4	0	3	0	0
Averages	12.2	3.33	0	1.67	0	4.5

Table 7

Instances of the Behaviors of the Literate Group at Time 1, January 25

Student	Attentive	Particip.	Inattentive	English	Native	Writing
N	8	5	0	3	0	4
H	11	4	0	5	n/a	0
N2	12	3	0	3	0	2
A	12	4	1	2	1	0
A2	12	4	0	1	1	2
M	10	4	0	1	0	5
A3	12	4	0	2	1	1
M2	13	3	1	1	1	1
Averages	11.25	3.88	0.25	2.25	0.38	1.88

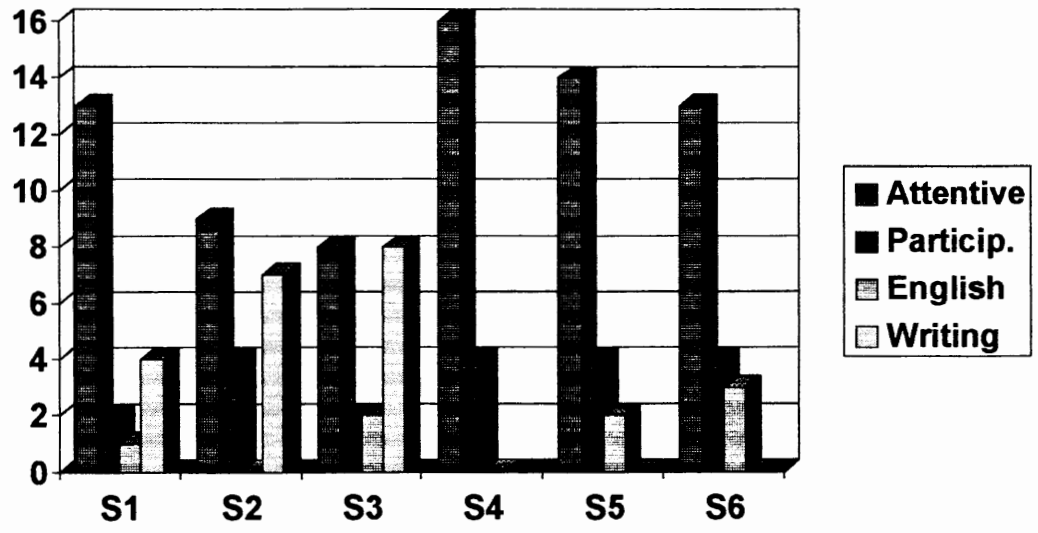

Figure 3 Non-Literate Behaviors at Time 1, January 25

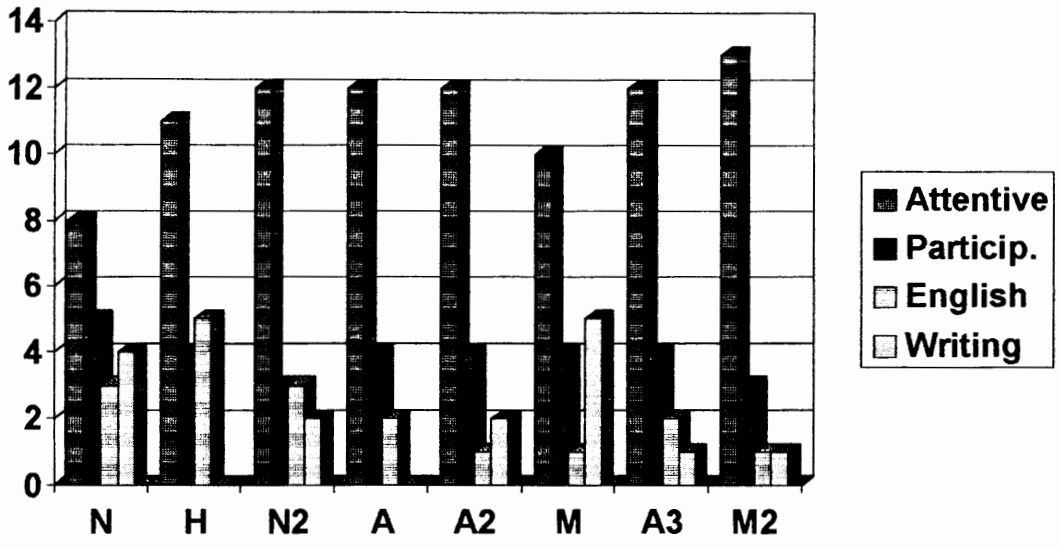

Figure 4 Literate Behaviors at Time 1, January 25

For this time period, the non-literate group is slightly more attentive and less participatory, based on the average number of instances from all students (attentive 12.1, participating 3.33), while the literate group is more participatory (3.88) and less attentive (11.25), as shown in Tables 6 and 7. Additionally, while the non-literate group did not speak as much English as the literate group (1.67 instances per student vs. 2.25), they did "write" more. Perhaps uncomfortable with speaking, they busied themselves with copying down the material. Surprisingly, two of the students with the greatest literacy problems "wrote" the most, while the others from that group did not. Also of note, the non-literate students did not speak their native language at all, while four of the literate students, all Russian, spoke it at least once.

Time 2 – February 1

During this class session, the instructor deviated from the usual procedure and conducted a "walk-about" activity on the subject of time. In this "individual" activity (as opposed to "group"), students had to walk around and find information posted in the room. The instructor then called the class back together to recite individually the information found.

Table 8

Instances of the Behaviors of the Non-Literate Group at Time 2, February 1

Student	Attentive	Particip.	Inattentive	English	Native	Writing
S1	14	1	0	2	0	0
S2	16	0	0	0	n/a	0
S3	15	0	0	2	0	0
S4	absent					
S5	15	0	0	1	n/a	0
S6	15	0	0	1	1	0
Averages	15	0.2	0	1.2	0	0

Table 9

Instances of the Behaviors of the Literate Group at Time 2, February 1

Student	Attentive	Particip.	Inattentive	English	Native	Writing
N	13	0	0	0	1	2
H	absent					
N2	13	0	0	2	0	1
A	15	0	0	1	0	0
A2	absent					
M	11	0	0	2	0	3
A3	14	0	0	1	1	0
M2	14	0	0	1	1	0
Averages	13.33	0	0	1.17	0.5	1.0

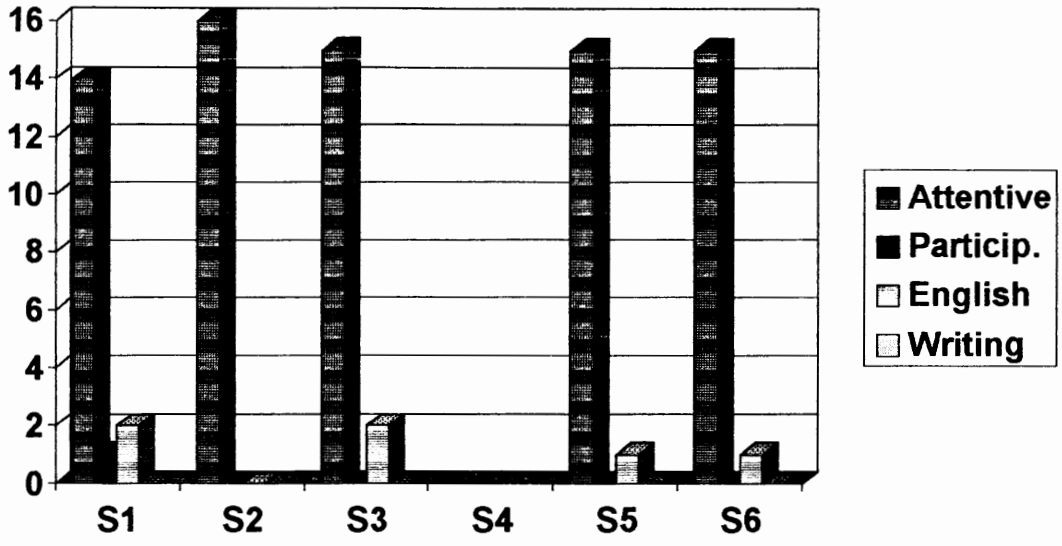

Figure 5 Non-Literate Behaviors at Time 2, February 1

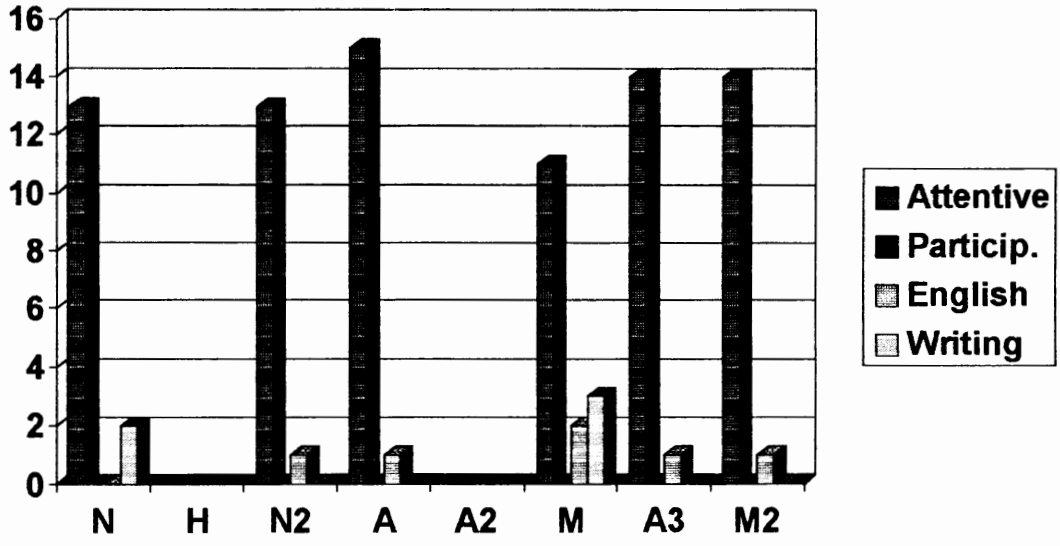

Figure 6 Literate Behaviors at Time 2, February 1

Although there was not much chance for speaking practice, the non-literate group did average 1.2 instances of speaking English to the literate group's 1.16 instances. All students were very attentive, with S2 being attentive to the exclusion of all else.

As the activities for this day did not lend themselves to great variations in reactions, the behaviors of the two groups did not differ from each other in any noteworthy way.

Time 3 – February 15

Time 3 began with whole class practice of a dialogue about health, which lasted about 15 minutes. This was followed up by a short writing task on the same topic, ending with a whole class review of the material.

Table 10

Instances of the Behaviors of the Non-Literate Group at Time 3, February 15

Student	Attentive	Particip.	Inattentive	English	Native	Writing
S1	18	1	1	0	0	2
S2	absent					
S3	14	1	2	0	3	2
S4	16	2	0	2	1	1
S5	18	0	0	0	n/a	4
S6	11	1	3	1	3	3
Averages	15.4	1.0	1.2	0.6	1.17	2.4

Table 11

Instances of the Behaviors of the Literate Group at Time 3, February 15

Student	Attentive	Particip.	Inattentive	English	Native	Writing
N	absent					
H	absent					
N2	17	1	1	0	0	3
A	16	2	0	3	0	1
A2	absent					
M	13	1	0	4	0	4
A3	14	1	0	0	5	2
M2	14	1	0	1	5	1
Averages	14.8	1.2	0.2	1.6	2.0	2.2

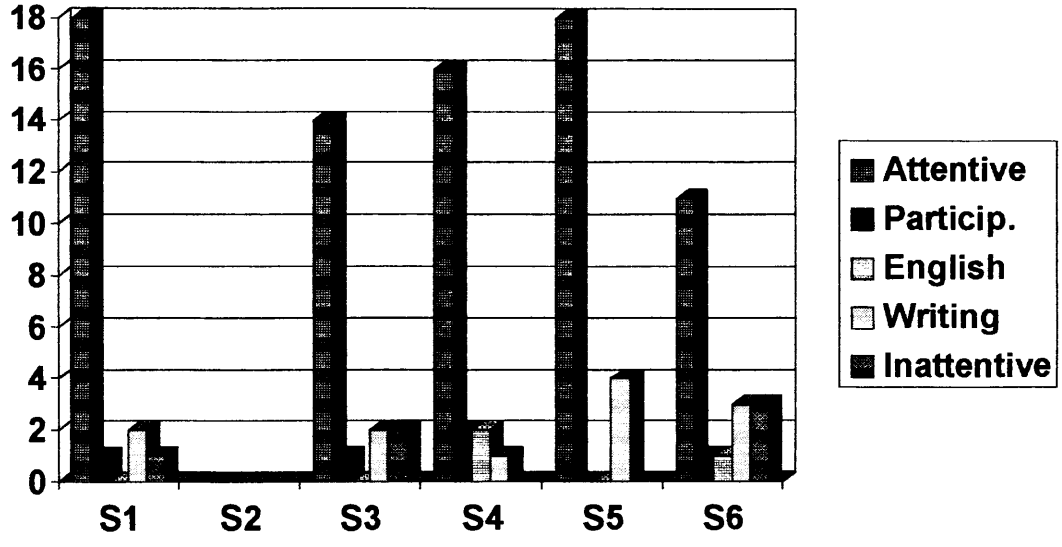

Figure 7 Non-Literate Behaviors at Time 3, February 15

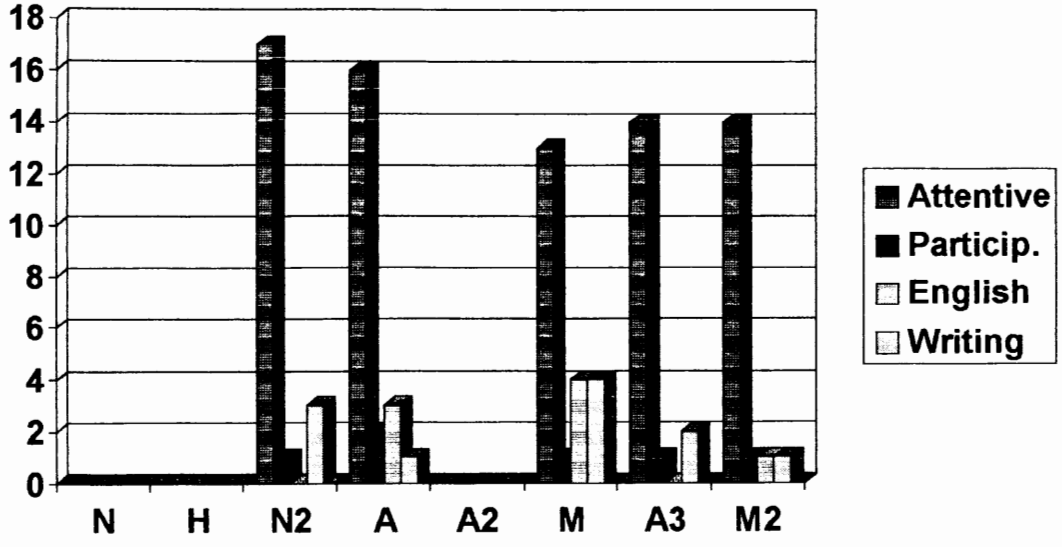

Figure 8 Literate Behaviors at Time 3, February 15

As in previous lessons, all the students were attentive, with the non-literate students slightly more passively attentive than the literate students. Of note in these results are two items: the instances of speaking English and, for the first time of any significance, the instances of being inattentive. On this particular day there are very few instances of the students speaking, even with the literate students, on average, speaking nearly three times as often as the non-literate students. However, S4, who had only spoken minimally, if at all, in previous classes, was observed to have spoken at least twice, a marked improvement. For the first time, three of the non-literate students were observed to be inattentive, especially S3 and S6. Presumably this is because of the writing activity in the lesson.

Time 4 – February 21

The class began with a whole class presentation of vocabulary related to housing. Only three of the original six non-literate students were present. Many of the literate as well as non-literate students were paying more attention to copying down the material than to actually practicing it orally. The instructor then had the class practice the new material with a choral repetition drill. This was followed by pair work with dialogues using questions such as "Do you have ...?" The whole class was then drawn back together to review the material.

Table 12

Instances of the Behaviors of the Non-Literate Group at Time 4, February 21

Student	Attentive	Particip.	Inattentive	English	Native	Writing
S1	absent					
S2	12	0	0	0	0	6
S3	5	2	5	3	0	4
S4	absent					
S5	10	1	0	3	0	4
S6	absent					
Averages	9.0	1.0	1.67	2.0	0	4.67

Table 13

Instances of the Behaviors of the Literate Group at Time 4, February 21

Student	Attentive	Particip.	Inattentive	English	Native	Writing
N	9	0	2	2	1	4
H	4	1	5	0	0	8
N2	6	3	0	4	0	5
A	9	3	1	4	0	1
A2	4	4	1	4	0	5
M	2	2	1	4	0	9
A3	10	2	0	1	0	5
M2	6	2	1	2	1	6
Averages	6.25	2.13	1.38	2.63	0.25	5.38

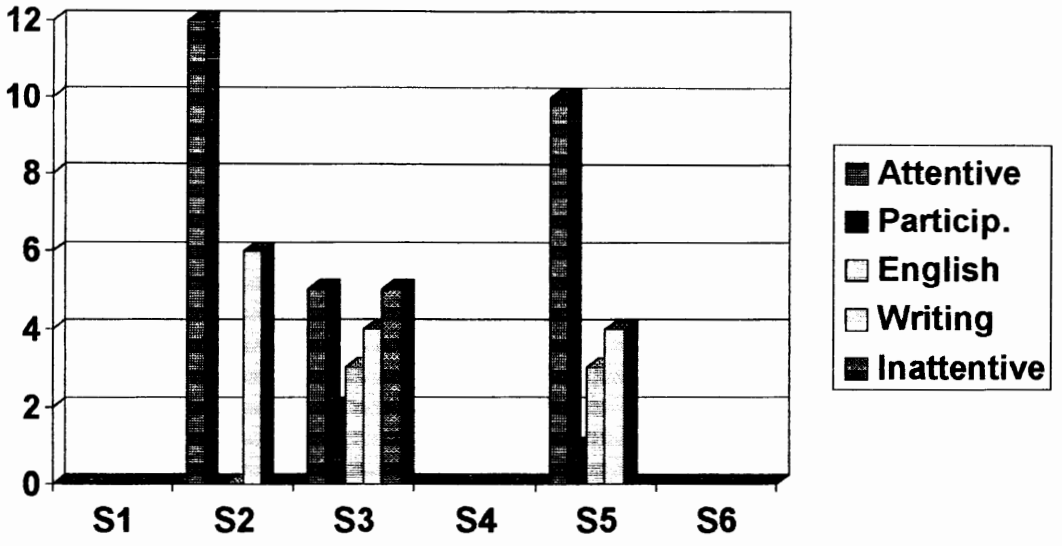

Figure 9 Non-Literate Behaviors at Time 4, February 21

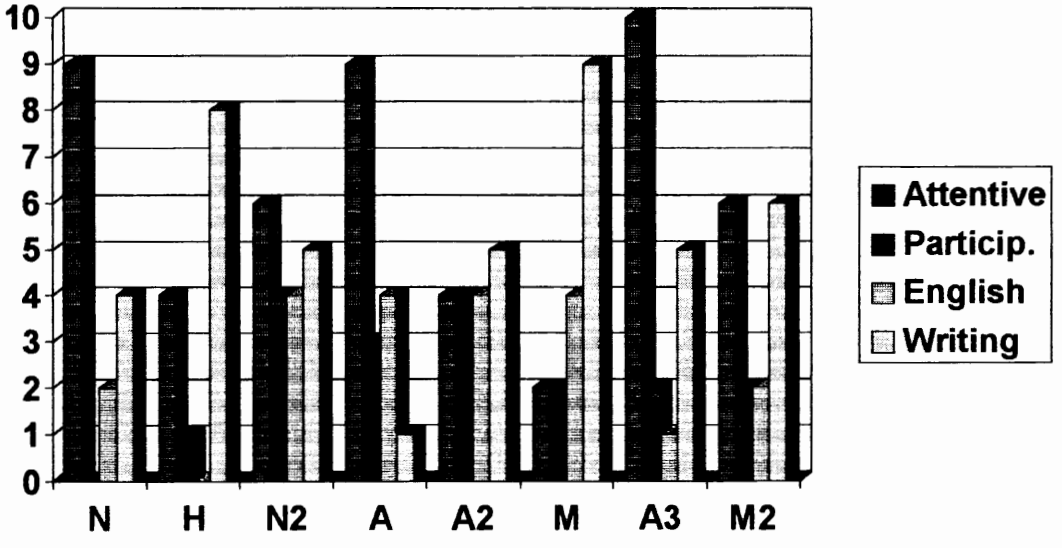

Figure 10 Literate Behaviors at Time 4, February 21

As mentioned earlier in the discussion of the BEST results, the non-literate students, by the end of the term, had become more and more unlike each other, as illustrated in Figure 9. S2, who had not spoken much English all term, on this day did not speak at all, but wrote a lot of material down. Though attentive, he did not participate in either the whole class or pair activities. S3 had improved, spending his time more or less equally among the five behaviors, although on this day he was inattentive one third of the time. S5 had also improved. However, on this day she still continued to be primarily passively attentive than participating actively in the lesson.

The students in the literate group, however, seem to have become more like each other. As seen in the graph representing the literate students' activities, most of the bars end in the middle section of the graph in Figure 10. This means that the students were spending less time being passively attentive and more time doing other things. Specifically, more students were speaking more English and participating rather than being just silently attentive. Also, with the exception of student H, who was often absent or inattentive because of health problems, and student M, who spent an inordinate (for the level) amount of time writing furiously, all of the literate students were writing more often at this point.

Vocabulary quiz

The purpose of the aural vocabulary lesson and subsequent quiz was to determine if the verbal short term memory for new items differed between the literate and non-literate groups.

Even for this small sample size, the two groups do not differ from each other significantly. All but one student scored 100% (9 points) on the quiz. Only S4 scored 6 points.

No supportable conclusions can be drawn from the results of the vocabulary/listening quiz. The data could, however, lend themselves to three possible speculations as to the results' homogeneity.

First, perhaps there is no difference in the short term memory capabilities of literate and non-literate students for newly-learned aural material. Non-literate students may be used to coping with literate situations by quickly memorizing necessary information and thus possess skills that compensate for their lack of the advantages a literate student may possess in a learning situation.

Second, the aural lesson preceding the test was extremely teacher-directed and controlled. The results of the activities preferences survey, as are discussed hereafter, indicated that the non-literate students in this case preferred whole-class, teacher-fronted activities. If that is indeed the case, then for this type of lesson, non-literate students could be expected to perform as well as their literate counterparts.

Finally, it could be that the lesson was overtaught and/or that the vocabulary quiz was administered too soon after the lesson. Had the quiz been given some days after the initial lesson, more differences in the outcome may have resulted.

Activities Preferences Survey

The activity preferences survey given to the students at the end of the term included eight categories of activities: writing, listening, pair work, group work, whole

class, individual help from the instructor, grammar and book work, and pronunciation. Each of these activities are defined in the table below.

Table 14

Description of the Activities Included in the Activities Preferences Survey

Activity	Description
Writing	Filling in missing words, such as in a cloze exercise, or brainstorming words about a topic, such as weather.
Listening	Dictation, class pronunciation work, and TPR.
Pair work	Pronunciation practice in pairs, dialogue practice, information gap activities.
Group work	Problem-solving activities such as putting pictures or strip sentences in order for a logical story.
Whole class	Vocabulary and phrase drills, teacher question-answer, class practice of dialogues, pronunciation, presentation of material.
Individual Help from the Instructor	One-on-one assistance during an individual activity.
Grammar and Book Work	Whole class presentation of grammar with or without the text, activities in which the textbook is used.
Pronunciation and Speaking	Whole class or group work on pronunciation or dialogues.

The categories of activities can be divided into two types: teacher-directed, highly structured activities and semi-controlled, structured activities. The former includes activities such as phonetic practice, drills and content presentation. The latter includes activities such as conversation in dyads and groups, problem-solving and role plays (Crookes & Chaudron, 1991). For this reason, in Figures 15 and 16 illustrating the students' responses to the survey, writing, grammar and book work, and pronunciation have been omitted as they represent and overlap with the teacher-directed, whole class activities. Therefore, when interpreting the graphs, the semi-controlled, structured

activities include group and pair work. Listening, whole class and individual help from the teacher fall under teacher-directed, controlled activities.

In spite of the fact that listening activities could be included in both the teacher-directed and semi-controlled types of activities, the researcher chose not to omit this category because of the special aural vocabulary lesson. At the time of the lesson, the students had been told that this was a special listening activity. It is hence of interest to this study how the students felt about it.

It should be noted that only four of the six non-literate subjects were present the day of the evaluation. The results, therefore, more than in other parts of the study, reflect the preferences of this special group of individuals (S1, S2, S5 and S6). All twenty-two literate students' responses are included in the graph. All had consented at the beginning of the term to be part of the study. Also, by including all instead of the selected few who had been chosen for other parts of the study, the graph better represents the preferences of the literate students in the class as a whole.

Table 15

Activity Preferences of the Literate Group

Category	☺ -- Like	😐 -- OK	☹ -- Dislike
Writing	18	3	0
Listening	21	0	0
Pair Work	13	7	0
Group Work	15	6	0
Whole Class	15	2	2
Individual Help	15	5	0
Grammar and Book Work	15	7	0
Pronunciation and Speaking	15	4	0

Table 16

Activity Preferences of the Non-Literate Group

Category	☺ -- Like	😐 -- OK	☹ -- Don't Like
Writing	3	1	0
Listening	3	0	1
Pair Work	2	2	0
Group Work	1	2	0
Whole Class	4	0	0
Individual Help from Teacher	3	1	0
Grammar and Book Work	3	1	0
Pronunciation and Speaking	3	1	0

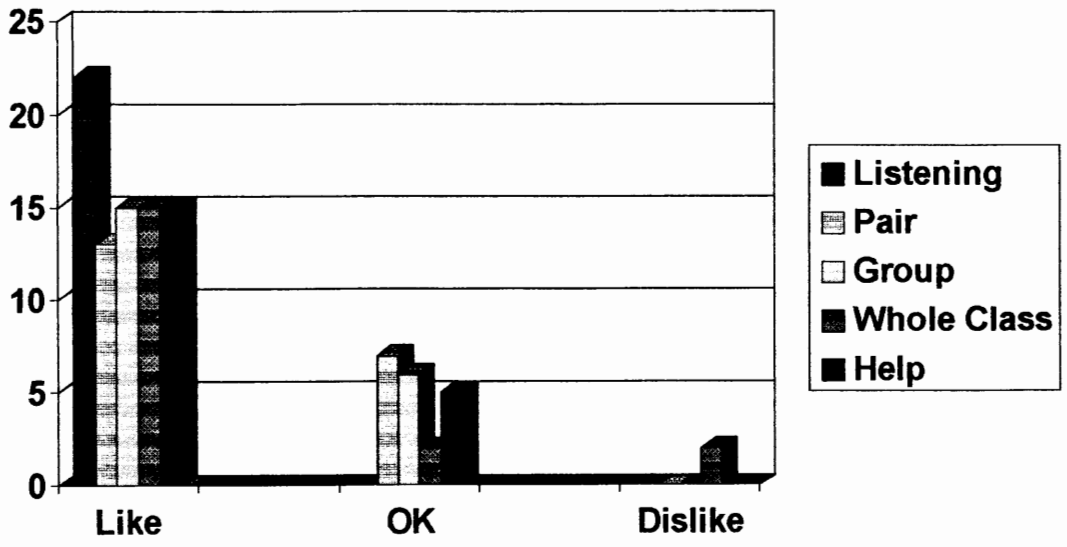

Figure 11 Activity Preferences of the Literate Group

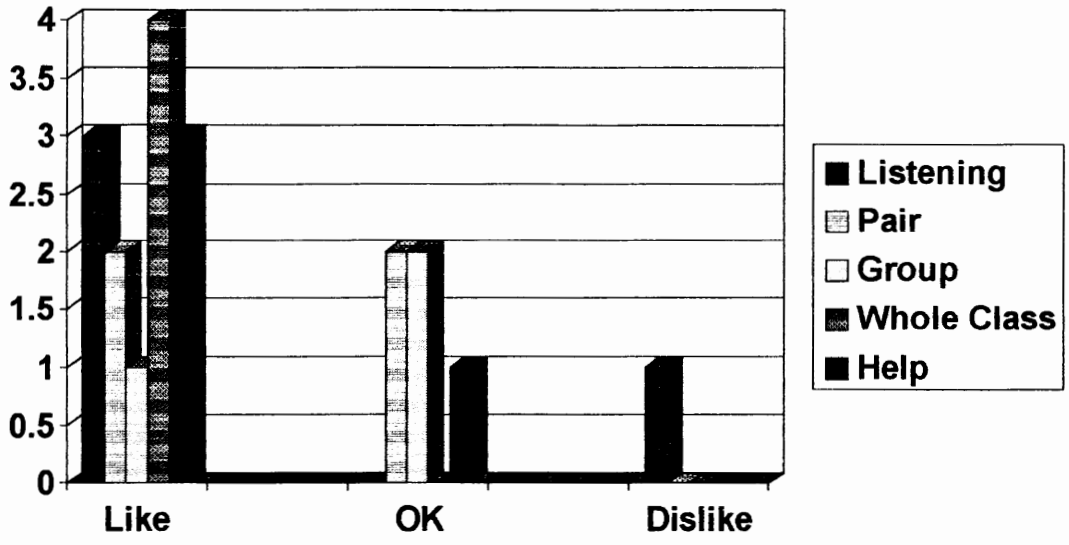

Figure 12 Activity Preferences of the Non-Literate Students

While the literate students appear to like both teacher-directed and semi-controlled activities equally well, with the exception of a unanimous favorable response to listening, the non-literate students in this class appear to prefer the teacher-directed and highly structured activities. They also seem to prefer whole class activities, such as drills. Whether this is true of non-literate students in the classroom in general requires a larger sample size from a variety of environments. However, it could be surmised that non-literate students, unused to the classroom environment, may prefer the predictability of controlled activities, as well as the instant feedback that goes along with such activities. On the other hand, literate students, more comfortable with the classroom environment, may need less feedback and are able to accept and benefit from a variety of teaching techniques.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Although the results of any study this small lack statistical validity, significant observations about non-literate students still can be drawn from this case. It does appear that L1 literacy enhances L2 oral proficiency development in the classroom environment. The literate students' familiarity with classroom procedures appears to give them an edge, even in oral activities. They make better use of their time than do the non-literate students. Their oral progress, as shown by the comparison of the two groups' mean scores, is greater as well.

In terms of the guiding questions and hypotheses presented in Chapter 1, some of the results would suggest that the hypotheses are supported, while other results do not. What follows is a discussion of the results using the hypotheses, a comparison of this study with the studies outlined in Chapter 2, the limitations of the present study, suggestions for further research and implications for the classroom instructor.

Hypothesis #1

As stated in Chapter 1, the first hypothesis proposed that a student's inability to read in L1 negatively affects the rate of the student's L2 oral proficiency development as measured by the BEST, a pictorial listening test and class observations focusing on the frequency of the student's use of English in the classroom.

With regard to the BEST, the hypothesis is supported. Looking at the average pre-test and post-test scores for each group, the literate students' pre-test scores were

higher and they tended to improve by a wider margin on the post-test than the students in the non-literate group.

The observation data also suggest that literate students speak more English overall in class. As Figures 3 through 10 in Chapter 4 illustrate, the literate students appear to have been speaking English more and more frequently as the term progressed, while the instances of the non-literate students speaking English are more sporadic. The average number of instances for each group at Time 1 and Time 4 also suggest greater confidence on the part of the literate students. At Time 1, the literate group was averaging 2.25 instances of speaking English per student, compared with the non-literate average of 1.67 instances per student. Then, at Time 4, the literate group was averaging 2.63 instances per student, compared with the non-literate average of 2.0 (with only three non-literate students present).

The two sets of data complement one another. Because the literate students have become more comfortable with speaking English over the course of the term, they are gaining more speaking practice. This then translates into higher BEST scores at the end of the term. The non-literate students, perhaps less comfortable with practicing English in class, or not getting enough opportunity to do so because of the literate students' talkativeness, thus score lower on the second administration of the BEST.

The first hypothesis was not supported, however, by the results of the pictorial listening test, where all but one of the students scored 100% (9:9). For reasons discussed in Chapter 4, it may be that for newly learned aural material, there is little difference in the retention capabilities of both groups. The non-literate students may

have efficient memorization skills which they have needed to survive in situations requiring literacy. Whether the abilities of the two groups are indeed equal in this regard, however, is speculation at best, as a second, time-delayed post-lesson quiz of the vocabulary lesson was not administered.

The results of the vocabulary test are also inconsistent with the assumption based on the study by Smith, Mann and Shankweiler, whose 1986 study found that poor readers performed less well on an oral memory test than more proficient readers. In that study, the subjects were monolingual children, and the material they were required to repeat had not been taught to them, as in the present study. The researcher would like to believe that the present study is a more realistic assessment of oral learning in the classroom than the Smith, et al., study in that most students are taught beforehand the material they are required to recite on a test.

Hypothesis #2

This hypothesis proposed that non-literate students of the study would prefer certain types of classroom activities over others as compared with the literate students of the study. This was measured by the students' behaviors encoded in a classroom observation instrument, as well as by a pictorial activities preferences questionnaire. Given the sporadic attendance of the non-literate students and the fact that only four of them filled out the questionnaire, the generalizations are at best anecdotal descriptions and confirmations of informal conjectures.

The observations did not yield any striking information about the non-literate students' preferences in terms of their behavior, other than that when the literate students' participation increased, so did non-literate students' participation.

Because the results of the listening/vocabulary test show no clearly apparent differences between the literate and non-literate group in terms of memory capability, any conclusions based on these data are purely speculative.

However, it could be that non-literate students prefer more teacher controlled and teacher directed activities over "looser" communicative activities with less teacher involvement, based on their good performance on the test, as well as their responses to the questionnaire. This may be due to their unfamiliarity with the classroom setting and procedure. Immediate teacher feedback may assure them that they are performing as expected, whereas they may distrust the feedback of their peers in communicative activities.

Hypothesis #3

The third hypothesis presumed that the behaviors of non-literate students in the classroom would differ from those of literate students both in terms of type and frequency. This was indeed the case, as illustrated and discussed in Chapter 4. Non-literate students, while always attentive, more often tended to absorb lessons passively than to participate actively in the activities or speak English spontaneously.

Though it was expected that the literate students would write more often, the fact that some of the non-literate students also wrote, particularly when the activity required speaking, is significant. This may be because the non-literate students a) seeing

other students make notes to themselves, do not want to reveal their limitation, or b) feel it is expected of them as students, and thus write even though they cannot make any use of what they have written. Or, neither interested nor able to follow the presentation or activity, yet unwilling to offend the instructor by asking a question or leaving, they write merely to give themselves something to do until a more useful activity is introduced. These conjectures are based on similar reports found by both Lado (1990) and Shank (1986).

This creates a difficulty for the classroom instructor. By including written material in a primarily oral and aural lesson, non-literate students may still not benefit, missing vital practice while copying down the material. Yet, when no written material is included, the literate students are frustrated because of the lack of challenge. This common problem, in addition to the non-literate students preferring more structure in their lessons, supports one-on-one tutoring or a separate class for non-literate students before entering the beginning level ESL courses. In this way they could be introduced to the variety of teaching techniques present in literate classrooms without the intimidation caused by the presence of literate students. Later they then could be transferred to literate classrooms and be able to make more efficient use of the input they would receive.

Relation to Previous Studies

The results of this study find support in the previous studies of non-literate and literate ESL students. The difficulties encountered in this study, albeit on a smaller scale, also parallel those of the previous researchers.

Unlike the present study, the Robson (1982) study of the Hmong, the Burtoff (1985) study of the Haitian population in New York City, and the Klassen (1991) study of Toronto Latino students, all focused on monolingual subject pools, making a deeper, qualitative study more conceivable. Yet, like the present study, even these well-funded projects with, at the outset, large subject pools, in the end encountered similar setbacks in that through attrition, the subject pools shrank to render their quantitative results statistically unreliable (Robson's n = 62, Burtoff's n = 29). If further studies are to be done, this evidence would suggest more qualitative studies on the model of Klassen's interviews with the non-literate Latino students to discover what classroom activities and environments they prefer.

Klassen (1991) reports that the non-literate Latino students she interviewed admitted copying down material from the chalkboard, though indecipherable to them, just for something to do while the instructor spoke "over their heads." Some of the non-literate students in the present study exhibited similar behavior, particularly S2 and S3, who, although targeted as semi-literate, spent a relatively large amount of time writing when the primary activity was oral practice.

Recall that Long (1992) reports that L2 literacy is often resisted by Hmong women, upon whom falls the responsibility of safeguarding cultural traditions. For this reason, they are said to place greater emphasis on acquiring literacy in Hmong, if at all. This is not unlike S4 and S5 in the present study. S4, in a remark to the instructor, claimed to be studying the Koran at home, and not English, during the observance of Ramadan. Greater importance was given to maintaining cultural observances than to

developing literacy in English. S5 may possibly typify this thinking as well. Though a long-time resident of the U.S., her oral and literacy skills in English were quite low. Because interviews were not conducted, it is impossible to know for sure why this was so. Still, that cultural pressures could influence literacy development should be kept in mind when non-literate women are present in a beginning ESL class. Though the instructor may assume that their lack of progress in English is because of a limited educational background, it may be a result of cultural group pressures to give L1 literacy priority.

According to Robson (1982), students' lack of literacy skills affected their proficiency in English more than a lack of familiarity with the classroom. At one point in the planning of this study, it was suggested that non-literate students would, as a matter of course, not perform well in the classroom because of the unfamiliarity with class procedure. Yet both in Robson's study, and to a certain extent in the present study, this does not seems to be the case. On a student information form, some of the non-literate students claimed to have had at least some type of schooling in their country. Therefore, they were not completely unfamiliar with formal educational settings. Still, these non-literate students did not perform well on the BEST assessment of oral ability. It is not entirely clear what form that education took in their native countries, and it is possible that it was not similar to that of the literate students.

Burtoff's (1981) study of the literate and non-literate Haitian Creole speakers employed the BEST, while Robson's study employed the Ann and Ben Listening Test, a pictorial listening test not unlike the one used in the present study. In both cases,

students with native language literacy skills by and large performed better and made greater gains on the post-test (in the Burtoff study) than did the non-literate students. This parallels the findings in that portion of the present study.

Limitations of the Present Study

Like previous studies of non-literate students, this study has had limitations that have dogged it from the beginning. This is perhaps the most consistent and persistent limitation in all such research with non-literate students. That is, the results of most of the research in the end are contaminated by influences beyond the researchers' control.

Because an extremely small sample size was unavoidable, a case study format was chosen, in which several types of data-gathering techniques were employed. The sporadic attendance of the non-literate students hampered even this provision. Coincidentally, the Islamic observance of Ramadan took place during the period of the study, further reducing these students' already sketchy attendance. This prevented the researcher from getting both a pre- and post-test score for the BEST oral assessment for some students, as well as recording their behaviors on the days they were absent.

Also a result of the small sample size was that the members of this particular group of non-literate students were perhaps more unlike each other than would be usual for this type of class, as the large standard deviation of the BEST scores indicates.

Reality in adult ESL classrooms in the U.S. is a multilingual student population, even in classes with non-literate students. The reality of good research with a small sample size would include conducting interviews with each student and collecting rich data instead of thinner numerical data. The two realities do not mix well, however.

First, there is the problem of hiring interpreters for students who may not attend the class session for which the researcher had scheduled an interview with them. Second, in addition to this scheduling difficulty, the problems in finding an interpreter in the area for the few students in the class that speak an uncommon language would outweigh the benefits of the interviews because of the very real possibility that the students would not be entirely open and frank in their responses. If the students are not literate, it is also probable that an academic study of this nature may be completely out of their realm of understanding. For these reasons, interviews were not conducted in the present study.

However, were this type of research to be done again in the same setting, the researcher would suggest doing interviews to the exclusion of all else, in spite of the reservations just stated. Although we know what the students prefer and how they behaved in class, we do not know why; we can only speculate. In the end, knowing why has the greatest implications for the instructor.

Finally, the same oral assessment test was administered, verbatim, for both the pre- and post-test of the BEST, even though only two months separated the two administrations. There is a strong possibility that the students remembered how to answer each question, and, having received no feedback on a particular answer before, did not change it during the second administration. Were an instrument to be used as a pre- and post-test of oral assessment in the future, a test with two separate but equal textual versions, such as the BEST Oral Interview Short Form (for the pre-test) and Long Form (for the post-test), would be used to prevent similar interference with the results.

Suggestions for Further Study

As so little work has been done concerning non-literate ESL students, practically any research project undertaken could add to the knowledge available about them. However, a few suggestions could be made regarding the directions that such research could take.

The Burtoff study of Haitian Creole speakers in New York City and the Robson study of the Hmong in the Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand serve as compelling evidence that quantitative research on non-literate students, even with monolingual, "captive" subject groups, is fraught with problems. If these projects could not produce a large enough subject pool for findings of statistical significance, then it is unlikely others could do the same. Additionally, even if a reasonable sample size for quantitative research of non-literate students classroom learning could be obtained, there still would be no control over their L2 learning outside of class, which is probably where most of their skills are acquired. Nor would there be any control over the consistency of instruction in the classroom.

For these reasons, future research should focus on qualitative research gathered both from the student and from the instructor. Interviews, with cultural group members as interpreters, should investigate how the students feel about classroom activities, what they prefer to do in class, as well as what they do to learn English outside of class. Interviews with instructors should focus on how the instructor feels about having non-

literate students in class, as well as about special preparations made in advance to accommodate these students' special needs. This type of approach would provide the most in-depth information about the direction the teaching of non-literate students should take. Interviews with students, while highly subjective and perhaps unreliable, if carefully worded, would more clearly inform us as to how they learn and remember new material presented to them in the classroom setting.

Implications for Classroom Instruction

The clearest implication of this study for the classroom would be to have separate classes for literate and non-literate students, and not just at the beginning level. Since in recent times (mid-1990s), budget cuts have forced some ESL programs to discontinue separate tracks for literate and non-literate students, an individual tutor for the non-literate students in the classroom could serve to enhance their learning in the literate setting. If space and volunteers are available, a "tutor-group" for the students with literacy needs, either before or after the regular class, could also supplement and assist in their mastery of the material presented in the classroom.

Not even considered in this study, but no less common to ESL classrooms, are the individuals who have high oral skills in English, often acquired in the workplace and social settings, but who have very little education and are often not literate. Separate classes for these students would be just as essential as for the beginning students. As this is not fiscally feasible at most public institutions, Rathburn (1995) suggests transitioning such non-native speakers with high oral skills (i.e. SPL 5 or higher) into Adult Basic

Education programs, where the students' literacy needs are more likely to be specifically addressed.

Teacher-directed and controlled activities, with much feedback, should be incorporated to a greater degree in classes with a high percentage of non-literate students. As indicated in the present study, the literate students do not object to such activities, and the non-literate students appear to respond to them much better than to less controlled activities.

Controlled whole class activities can include listening and pronunciation, as well as the usual question-answer on familiar topics, but should by no means be limited to these activities. The time spent on student-to-student interaction should be maximized at all times.

Activities appropriate for both literate and non-literate students can have varied degrees of teacher involvement, and take a variety of forms. For example, songs and rhythmic recitations, such as Carolyn Graham's Jazz Chants (1978), can be taught without written text, yet are easily remembered because of their musical qualities. Whole class as well as pair practice in pronunciation is possible using Baker and Goldstein's Pronunciation Pairs (1990), in which minimal pairs are illustrated pictorially and contrasted. These can also be used as a phonics-based literacy activity. Additionally, the illustrations of everyday objects and situations in Irene Frankel's The New Oxford Picture Dictionary (1988) lend themselves to pair practice as well as the controlled creation of dialogues.

Student-centered and student-generated materials can be used at this level as well. "Line-ups" are a good choice, particularly for multi-level classes with non-literate students, because literacy level does not determine who is "first" or "last." In the activity, students make a line, or "line up," according to a variety of facts about themselves, e.g. by their first names, last names, how long they have been in the U.S., etc. For example, the students who have lived in the U.S. the longest are at one end of the line, and new arrivals are at the other. Total Physical Response (TPR), is also appropriate for both literate and non-literate students. In this type of activity, the student learns commands which can be physically demonstrated (e.g. "stand up"). After practicing the activity with the instructor, they then can practice giving the commands to each other. Chain drills also maximize the use of student-generated material. The instructor asks Student A a question, such as "How are you?" Student A responds, then asks the same question to Student B, who responds and then asks Student C, and so it can continue. In a variation, the instructor asks Student A the question, and then asks Student B to report that information in third person.

Finally, pictures, such as those used in the listening/vocabulary lesson of the present study, are adaptable to a number of instructional objectives. If oral practice is the objective, picture dictations are appropriate for both literate and non-literate students. The instructor, or a student, arranges a set of pictures, and then dictates the order of the pictures to another student, who has the same set of pictures. If literacy skills are the objective, a "walkabout" is possible. The pictures are posted around the

room. The students, given a single word or sentence cue, must find the picture that matches the cue.

Writing at this level is always controlled, regardless of literacy level. For the non-literate student, however, the presence of an in class individual tutor may lessen the anxiety and increase the benefit the student could gain from writing activities.

Finally, as the classroom observation portion of the study showed, non-literate students are often very passive in the classroom. For this reason, the instructor should make special efforts to make the non-literate students feel included and maximize their involvement. This could involve encouraging them to sit near the front or middle of the classroom (the study showed that the non-literate students tend to sit near the back), conducting fewer text-based activities, presenting new material visually, and encouraging their participation where their abilities match those necessary for the activity.

Implications for ESL Teacher Training

Master's and certificate programs in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) claim to prepare their students for teaching positions in settings ranging from public schools, overseas language institutes, university and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) programs, and community colleges. The "beginning level student" of the TESOL texts is always literate and would be classified by most community college ESL programs as "high intermediate," or possessing an SPL of 5. Not surprisingly, graduates of these programs are often unprepared to teach very low level students, particularly those with literacy needs. Ironically, the employers of many of these graduates, if they do not go overseas, are community college ESL programs, the

directors of which are looking for instructors with some experience in, or ideas of how to address, literacy issues. If the TESOL student is interested in adult education issues, he or she already has made a point of practice teaching at a community college, but this may be the student's only experience with low level learners. TESOL program administrators need to recognize this need of the employers in the community they claim to serve by including at least one, if not more, courses that focus on the multiple factors which affect the learning outcomes of non-literate and low level students of English. Such a course could include cultural views of literacy (e.g. Do the women of that culture want to learn to read?), activities appropriate for non-literate and low level learners, and a simulated, multi-level classroom experience in which the TESOL students attempt to learn a language they can neither speak nor read (e.g. Arabic, Chinese, or Hindi) together with more advanced students (e.g. Chinese majors) of that language. Only then could they have some idea of how the non-literate and low level learners feel in literate ESL classrooms.

Implications for ESL Program Administration

One of the goals of this study was to provide evidence that separate tracks for literate and non-literate students are essential for community college ESL programs. For a program director to make that kind of decision in these fiscally uncertain times for public education, the evidence needs to be particularly convincing. The strongest pieces of evidence that this study can offer are the non-literate students' passive behavior in the classroom, their sporadic attendance and, perhaps most convincing, their lack of oral gains on the BEST assessment. Non-literate adult beginning ESL students are not

making oral gains proportional to the amount of time that they spend in class. Yet the numbers of non-literate students in a given class often are not sufficient to open another section, which must maintain a 15 student minimum. As mentioned above, the most cost effective solution would be to make an instructor, if funds allow, or a trained and enthusiastic volunteer tutor available to the students on a regular basis to familiarize them with typical activities that they may encounter in the classroom. If this type of support group is not possible, active use of classroom tutors in conversation groups during class time could give the non-literate students the speaking time they need to make noticeable gains in their oral proficiency development.

REFERENCES

Asher, J. (1977). Learning another language through actions: The complete teacher's guidebook. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions.

Baker, A. and Goldstein, S. (1990). Pronunciation pairs. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bassano, Sharon (1990). First class reader! Hayward, CA: Alemany Press/Janus Book Publishers, Inc.

Burtoff, M. (1985). Haitian Creole literacy evaluation study: Final report. New York: The Haitian Centers Councils, Inc. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 277 273.)

California State Department of Education. (1981). Non-literate ESL students: An introduction. Sacramento, CA: California State Department of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 337 058).

Crookes, G. and Chaudron, C. (1991). Guidelines for classroom language teaching. In M. Celce-Mucia (Ed.), Teaching English as a second or foreign language (pp. 46-77). New York: Newbury House.

Dinklage, K. (1971). Inability to learn a foreign language. In G. Blaine, Jr. & C. McArthur (Eds.), Emotional problems of the student (pp. 185 - 206). New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts Educational Division/Meridith Corporation.

Frankel, I. (1988). The new Oxford picture dictionary. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Graham, C. (1979). Jazz chants: Rhythms of American English for students of English as a second language. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Greenfield, P.M. (1972). Oral or written language: The consequences for cognitive development in Africa, the United States and England. Language & Speech, 15, 169-178.

Heath, S.B. (1986). Critical factors in literacy development. In S. De Castell, A. Luke & K. Egan (Eds.), Literacy, society and schooling: A reader (pp. 209-229). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hudelson, S. (1987). The role of native language literacy in the education of language minority children. Language Arts, 64, 827-841.

Klassen, C. (1991). Obstacles to learning: The account of low-education Latin American adults. New Westminster, BC: Douglas College. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 333 762).

Klassen, C. and Burnaby, B. (1993). Those who know: Views on literacy among adult immigrants in Canada. TESOL Quarterly, 27, 377-379.

Lado, A. (1990). Ways in which Spanish-speaking illiterates differ from literates in ESL classrooms. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 367 195).

Long, L.D. (1992). Literacy acquisition of Hmong refugees in Thailand. In F. Dubin and N.A. Kuhlman (Eds.), Cross-cultural literacy (pp. 35-46). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall.

Paul, M. (1986). Reading after survival literacy: Language immersion and an idea from Confucius. Journal of Reading, 29, 423-427.

Randhawa, B.S. (1987). From literacy to cognitive science. In C.K. Leong and B.S. Randhawa (Eds.), Understanding literacy and cognition: Theory, research and application (pp. 55-72). New York: Plenum Press.

Rathburn, R. (1995). ESL Transition to ABE/GED. (Available from Office of Community Colleges, State of Oregon, 255 Capitol Street, NE, Salem, Oregon 97310-0203).

Rivera, K. (1990). Developing native language literacy in language minority adults. ERIC Digest. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education.

Robson, B. (1982). Hmong literacy, formal education, and their effects on performance in an ESL class. In B.T Downing. and D.P. Olney (Eds.), The Hmong in the West (pp. 201-225). Minneapolis, MN: Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota.

Shank, C.C. (1986). Approaching the needs of adult illiterate ESL students. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 316 061).

Smith, S.T., Mann, V.A. & Shankweiler, D. (1986). Spoken sentence comprehension by good and poor readers: A study with the token test. Cortex, 22, 627-632.

Sparks, R.L. & Ganschow, L. (1991). Foreign language learning differences: Affective or native language aptitude differences? The Modern Language Journal, 75, 3-16.

Sparks, R.L. & Ganschow, L. (1993a). The impact of native language learning problems on foreign language learning; Case study of the Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis. The Modern Language Journal, 77, 58-74.

Sparks, R.L. & Ganschow, L. (1993b). Searching for the cognitive locus of foreign language learning difficulties: Linking first and second language learning. The Modern Language Journal, 77, 289-302.

Taber, P. (1987). Current definitions of literacy. Journal of Reading, 30, 458-461.

Wrigley, H.S. & Guth, G.J.A. (1992). Bringing literacy to life: Issues and options in adult ESL literacy. San Diego, CA: Dominie Press, Inc.

Appendix A

Bar Graphs of BEST Results

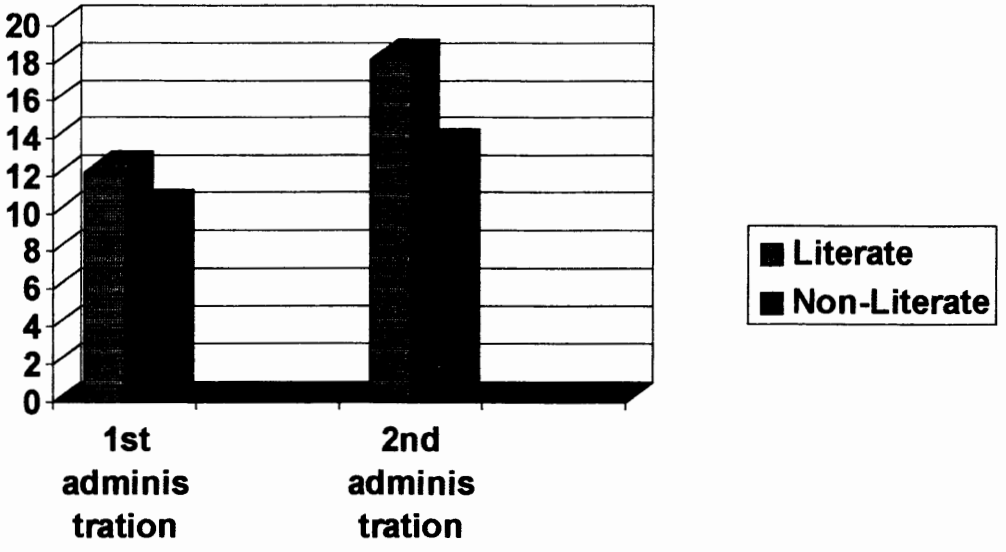

Figure 13 Averages of BEST Scores (40 points possible)

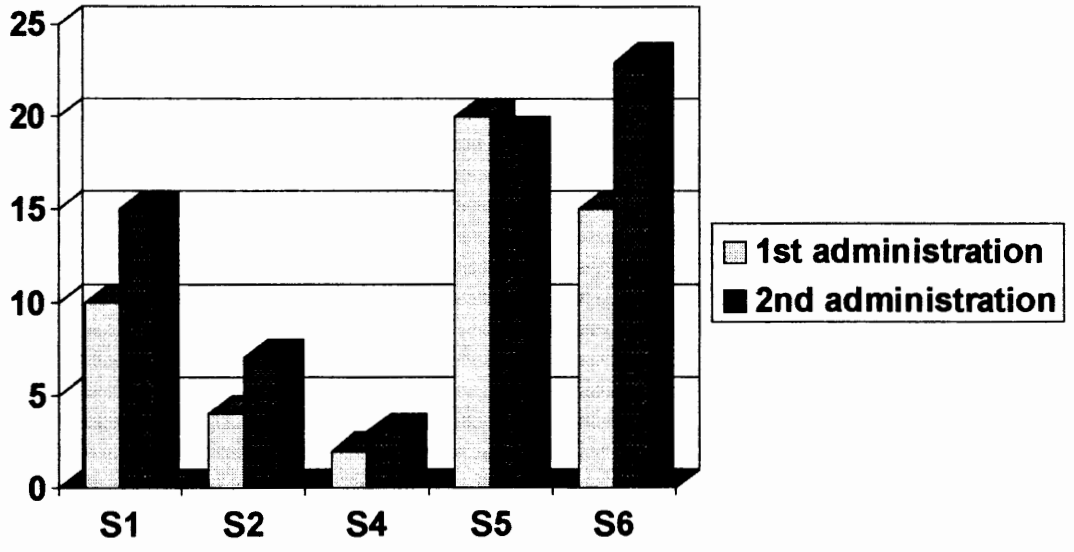

Figure 14 BEST Scores of the Non-Literate Students

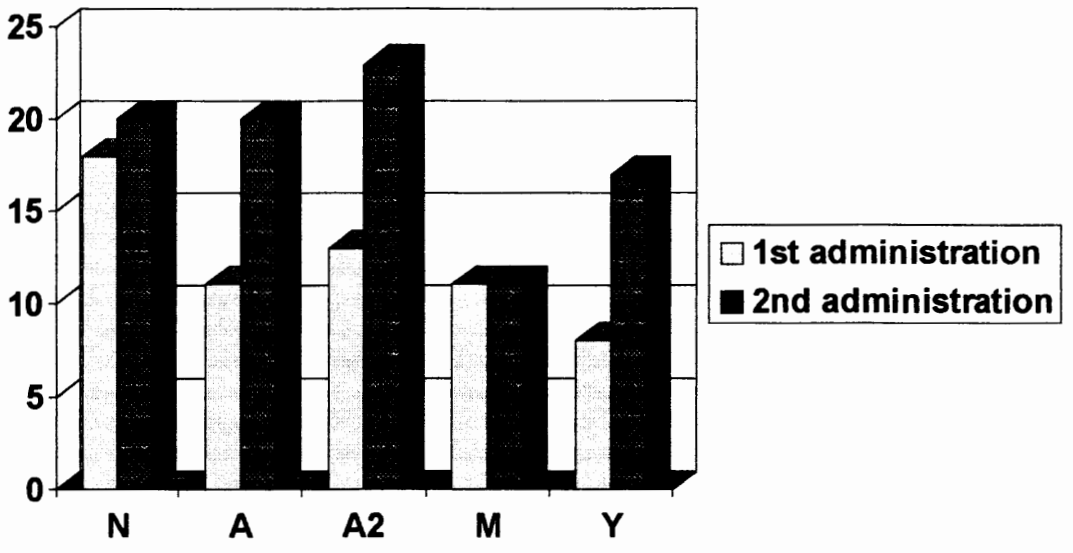

Figure 15 BEST Scores of the Literate Students

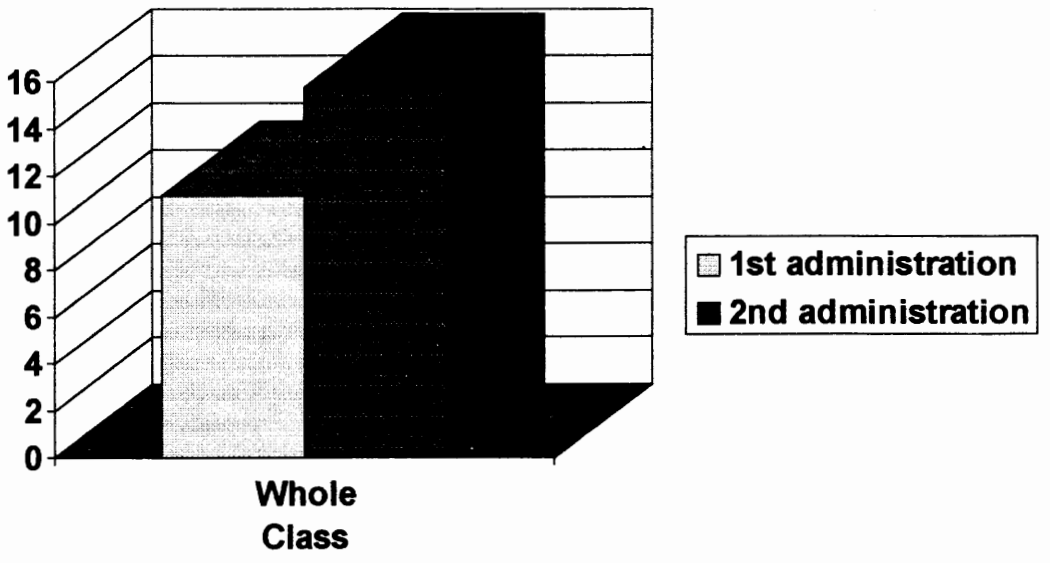

Figure 16 Average BEST Scores of the Whole Class

Appendix B

Numerical Data of the Four Averages of the Classroom Observations

Table 17

Average Number of Instances of Behaviors of the Non-literate Group

Student	Attentive	Particip.	English	Native	Writing
S1	15.0	1.33	1.0	0	2.0
S2	12.33	1.33	0	n/a	4.33
S3	10.50	1.25	1.75	0.75	3.5
S4	16.0	3.0	1.0	0.50	0.50
S5	14.25	1.25	1.50	n/a	2.0
S6	13.0	1.67	1.67	1.33	1.0

Table 18

Average Number of Instances of Behaviors of the Literate Group

Student	Attentive	Particip.	English	Native	Writing
N	10.0	1.67	1.67	0.67	3.33
H	7.50	2.50	2.50	n/a	4.0
N2	12.0	1.75	2.25	0	2.75
A	13.0	2.25	2.50	0.25	0.50
A2	8.0	4.0	2.50	0.50	3.50
M	9.0	1.75	2.75	0	5.25
A3	12.50	1.75	1.0	1.50	2.25
M2	11.75	1.50	1.25	2.0	2.0

Appendix C

Table 17

Sample Grid Used in Classroom Observations (Time 4 – February 21)

Activity Type	S3	H	Y	N2	S5	S2	A	A 2	M	A3	M 2	N
Whole	W	A	W	W	A	A	A	W	S*	W	W	S*
Class	S*	W	W	S*	S*	W	W	W	S*	A	W	W
-vocabulary	A	W	W	A	A	A	A	A	S*	A	A	S#
on housing	I	W	S*	S*	S*	W	S*	S*	S*	S*	S*	W
	S*	W	A	A	W	A	S*	W	W	A	A	S*
- some class	A	W	W	W	W	W	A	W	W	A	A	A
choral	A	W	A	A	A	A	A	I	W	W	A	A
repetition	I	I	W	S*	A	A	A	W	W	A	A	A
	I	I	S*	S*	A	A	A	S*	A	A	W	I
- pair work	W	I	A	W	W	A	S*	S*	A	A	A	A
with	W	P	P	P	A	A	I	P	W	A	P	I
"Do you	P	I	P	W	P	W	P	P	P	P	P	W
have....?"	P	W	P	P	W	W	P	P	P	P	S#	W
	O	W	P	P	A	W	P	P	W	W	I	A
	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	W	A	S	A
- whole	W	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	W	A	W	A
class	S*	I	W	A	A	A	A	A	W	W	W	A
	I	A	A	W	S*	A	S*	S*	I	W	W	A