



Big Ideas about Small Talk:
Teaching Introductory World Languages with an Evolutionary Understanding
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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
World Languages, Levels I and II
Spanish I/Spanish II

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Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: Most human speech is small talk. Humans spend the first several years of their lives developing a working proficiency in their native language, and in developed societies undergo years of additional formal instruction in the socially appropriate use of their home language. However, most spoken communication (and, in an increasingly technological world, a large amount of written communication) serves no discernible utilitarian purpose. Most talk is small talk. This is not an accident. Language evolved, first and foremost, to foster human social bonds and delineate social hierarchies. There is nothing small at all about “small talk”: it is the primary reason we speak at all. Effective second language instruction at the high school level will make explicit the importance of everyday informal interaction, apart from utilitarian function, and will create opportunities for students to practice small talk in scenarios, whether real or simulated, that are as naturalistic as possible. Second language instruction that takes into account the origins and purpose of human language will sustain the growing importance of language instruction in the face of technological developments that would, on the surface, seem to erode the relevance of language learning for the typical student.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year in 2015-2016 to 140 students in Spanish I and II.

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Understanding***

Matthew Kelly

Introduction: I Learned Human Evolution From the Movies, and You Probably Did, Too

When I was seven years old, my father took me to a screening of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.¹ This was one of his very few lapses into questionable parenting. (“Stanley Kubrick? The fellow who made *A Clockwork Orange*? I think my little boy would *love* one of his fine films!”) Naturally, I found the experience of being taken to such a mind-blowing and wholly inappropriate movie utterly thrilling. It was a solid win for questionable parenting.

In the opening scene of the film, a hairy, apelike hominin whose band has been bullied away from its water hole by a rival band picks up the femur of an ungulate while foraging. He realizes he can use the femur to smash things and to hunt the tapirs with which he and his mates currently compete for food. The next day, he leads his band to challenge the rival primates. When the rival alpha male challenges him with a threat display, he simply brains him with a massive leg bone. He and his rule the day. He throws the femur up into the air. The thrown leg bone transitions into a rocket ship in orbit millennia into the future.²

This scene encapsulates the dominant popular view of the dawn and evolution of human intelligence as much as it shaped my own view, a view that would not be shaken for many years: human intelligence developed, first and foremost, to facilitate ever increasing technological prowess. From the first tools made of found objects to the Internet, our intelligence developed so that we could *use* things and *make* things with ever-increasing complexity. This is what set the *Homo* genus apart from the other primates; this is what sets humans apart from all other species. As Sonia Harmand and others put it in the journal *Nature*, “The premise was that our lineage alone took the cognitive leap of hitting stones together to strike off sharp flakes and that this was the foundation of our evolutionary success.”³

There is a problem with this view acquired from popularized versions of science: it doesn't hold up to the current paleontology and archaeology. Recent discoveries from Kenya show that primates predating the earliest known evidence of the genus *Homo* by 700,000 years were making and using flaked stone tools.⁴ Even older animal bones with cut marks have been found, suggesting an even more ancient pre-human prehistory of tool use.⁵ Tool use was *not* the magic leap that humans, and humans alone, took. Other species used tools—and vanished.

The cranial capacity of one of the earliest known ancestors of humans, *Homo ergaster* (two million years ago) was 800 cubic centimeters. Modern *Homo sapiens sapiens* boasts a cranial capacity 81% larger at 1450 cubic centimeters.⁶ Yet, for hundreds of thousands of years of the Paleolithic era, while humans were developing larger and larger brains, basic technology—the stone hand axe—scarcely changed at all. We weren't developing bigger, more sophisticated brains for the purpose of producing more effective technology. Robbins Burling believes we were using our new, bigger brains to talk to each other.⁷ Language, not use of technology, is what fundamentally sets modern humans apart. If *2001: A Space Odyssey* had it right about the dawn of humankind, the rival bands of hominins might have built social ties with small talk and eventually negotiated mutual use of the contested water hole. (“Say, you're from Olduvai? I know an Australopithecus from Olduvai. Lucy? You know her! Small world...Say, about this watering hole...”)

We can break down social chat into two types of speech. The first is known as “phatic expression.” Phatic utterances are not intended to convey information; they signal a willingness to engage in or maintain a social relationship.⁸ They include greetings or such questions such as “How are you doing?” between acquaintances or strangers. Phatic expressions may serve as simple acknowledgment of another's action or presence, as when one thanks someone for holding a door. “Small talk,” on the other hand, conveys information, but the information is mostly (but not exclusively) social, rather than referential. Janet Holmes makes the useful observation that small talk is usually found at the boundaries of interaction—at the beginning and end of the work day, or at interludes or breaks in the flow of work. It is the means by which colleagues establish collegiality; it allows leaders simultaneously to assert hierarchical superiority (by setting the topics and limits of small talk) and to decrease social distance between themselves and their subordinates (by engaging them in small talk at all.)⁹ Phatic expression establishes that lines of communication are open; small talk establishes relationships and their boundaries—it allows colleagues to

demonstrate they are colleagues and leaders to demonstrate that they are leaders.

Most talk is simply chatting.¹⁰ This is not an accident. We will examine the work of two scholars, R. I. M. Dunbar and Jean-Louis Dessalles, who make persuasive arguments that language evolved, first and foremost, to foster human social bonds and delineate social hierarchies. There is nothing small at all about “small talk”: it is the primary reason we speak at all. Effective second language instruction at the high school level will make explicit the importance of everyday informal interaction, apart from utilitarian or transactional function, and will create opportunities for students to practice small talk in scenarios, whether real or simulated, that are as naturalistic as possible. Second language instruction that takes into account the origins and purpose of human language will sustain the growing importance of language instruction in the face of technological developments that would, on the surface, seem to erode the relevance of language learning for the typical student.

Educational Setting

I teach at Independence High School, a large public high school in Charlotte, North Carolina. Current enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year is 2,428 students. Of these students, the largest single ethnic group is White (871 students.) The school overall is majority-minority, with 730 African American students, 575 Hispanic students, and 144 Asian students. 9 students are American Indian (the official designation used, as opposed to Native American) and 199 report more than one race. The majority of students (55.2%) qualify for free or reduced lunch. The 2014 graduation rate was 89.9%.

256 students are designated Limited English Proficient. This subgroup of students faces special challenges. On state end of course tests, 80.2% of White students ranked as proficient, along with 61.4% of Hispanic students overall and 56.8% of African American students. Only 20.2% of Limited English Proficient students achieved a score ranked at proficient or better on end of course tests, behind students with disabilities (29.1% proficient.)

Rationale: Curriculum and Exit Proficiency Expectations for Novice Language Learners

Two semesters of Spanish (or another modern alphabetic language) represents 270-300 hours of instruction in North Carolina. These 270-odd hours of instruction are expected to bring students to the Novice High range

of interpersonal speaking proficiency under the guidelines set by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).¹¹ What can students *do*, in today's careers, with Novice High proficiency?

In terms of the requirements of most gainful work, not much. The most telling phrase in the ACTFL guidelines for interpersonal speaking proficiency at the Novice level is that the speaker “[*m*]ay show *emerging evidence* of the ability to engage in simple conversation” (emphasis added.)¹² Communication is highly dependent on familiar situations and extensively practiced memorized formulae. The speaker is able to provide some personal information on previously practiced topics. The speaker is able to ask questions as long as they are memorized, formulaic, and pertinent to the self and one's immediate environment.¹³

I've worked in banking in Charlotte in a bilingual capacity, and started out in what would be considered an entry-level position, answering calls in a call center. The job required us to be able to deal with customers presenting complex situations dealing with unfamiliar circumstances that might be a mix of past, present, future, or conjectural. Keep in mind, also, *this was an entry-level job*.

When we look at ACTFL guidelines to find a speaker who can fully express him- or herself on both new and familiar work-related topics, that speaker falls in the Advanced range.¹⁴ Expectations for Advanced interpersonal speaking proficiency *start*, according to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, after *six semesters* or 810 to 900 hours of instruction.¹⁵ According to Mara Cobe, the Area Specialist for World Languages Instruction for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the overwhelming majority of our language learners end their instruction after only two semesters.¹⁶

Of course, as language teachers, we want to expand language education in the public schools and encourage more students to take higher level courses. However, even if we convinced a substantial percentage of our students to study a language for four semesters of high school, we'd only be getting them to the Intermediate Mid level of interpersonal speaking proficiency, well below the requirements for most language-specific entry-level work.¹⁷ If the goal of public school language instruction is to turn out workers with job-specific, workplace-ready skills, the taxpayer is getting a very poor return on investment indeed. It is understandable that reflective practitioners such as Mrs. Cobe would be very concerned.

I share the goal of lifting up students with valuable job-ready skills. I also share the goal of encouraging deeper, longer and more meaningful language study in the public schools. However, I'm not ready to join the ranks of teachers wringing their hands and saying, "Two semesters? What can they do with *two semesters*? They can do *nothing!*" because that simply isn't true. Two semesters of Spanish, or another language, is quite enough to provide students with valuable skills and a lifetime of enriching experiences—provided we, as teachers, understand what skills we are teaching and are deliberate about doing so.

When we look at the hallmarks of proficiency expectations for novice learners—brief, highly formulaic communication on familiar topics, mostly related to the self—these are the characteristics of what we call "small talk." There is nothing small at all about small talk. Effective small talk forms social bonds, builds group cohesion, and fits us into a social hierarchy. Small talk, indeed, is some of the most important talking we do. With two semesters of Spanish, our students will be able to do *wonderful* things.

Background: The Human Brain is Built By and For Small Talk

As mentioned in the Introduction, incrementally more and more human hominins were cavorting about the planet for millennia, growing larger and larger brains, before they developed *any* technology more sophisticated than a stone hand axe. When it was assumed the human brain developed to facilitate technological advance, it was assumed that language, too, developed for the same purpose.¹⁸ Actual coordination of labor and teaching of practical skill, however, in subsistence societies requires very little language use at all.¹⁹ Humans spend the first several years of their lives developing a working proficiency in their native language, and in developed societies undergo years of additional formal instruction in the socially appropriate use of their home language. However, most spoken communication (and, in an increasingly technological world, a large amount of written communication) serves no discernible utilitarian purpose.

Most human speech—more than half, and up to about two-thirds – is small talk. Specifically, Robin Dunbar's statistical analysis of recorded casual conversations in social settings found that 55% of what men talk about and 66.7% of what women talk about has to do with personal experiences and relationships. His findings were in line with the findings of prior studies by other researchers showing a range of between 50% and 70% of conversation dedicated to social topics.²⁰ People talk about what they and others are doing, about relationships, about likes and dislikes.²¹

Robin Dunbar has an interesting theory for *why* so much of our speech seems, on the surface, to be so much small talk. His proposition is that such small talk is precisely what the brain evolved for. Extant non-human primates, from monkeys to apes, use mutual grooming to build social ties and extend social influence. Two things happened to human beings that made it impossible for our ancestors to use mutual grooming as a mechanism for maintaining social cohesion and establishing social hierarchies. Hominin social groups became too large for individuals to have time to groom enough members of the group to wield adequate influence. Then, in time, the hair covering most of our ancestors' bodies became so short and so fine as to make mutual grooming unnecessary.²²

It's a popular misconception that primates rid each other of insect pests and lice during grooming sessions. People watching nature shows over the years have merely assumed that such a costly, time-consuming behavior would have a practical, survival-related role with a tangible end. Logically, because of the close contact involved, social grooming could almost certainly *not* have evolved as a mechanism for removing lice, fleas, or ticks, as the individual doing the grooming would not be able to rid an infested neighbor of pests but the individual being groomed would almost certainly transmit fleas, lice or mites to the one doing the grooming. The truth is that primates other than humans generally do not carry pests. Primates remove very little actual matter from each other's fur, and most of it consists of small bits of dirt or vegetable matter. The concrete ends of social grooming are cosmetic, if anything. The individual doing the grooming isn't a nurse treating a patient for lice—a valet going over his patron's suit with a lint brush would be a better analogy. Primates invest much more time than is necessary, from a practical point of view, in this behavior, and the physical effects are cosmetic. Depending on the species, these primates spend as much as ten to twenty percent of their waking hours engaged in grooming behavior, removing burrs, bits of leaf and dander.²³ Grooming has more of an effect on the *mood* of the groomed individual than on the pelt; animals suffering from opiate withdrawal in laboratory studies request more grooming from their peers.²⁴ Social grooming is the primary means by which non-human primates form social coalitions and jockey for reproductive success.²⁵ The purpose of primate social grooming, then, is social, rather than utilitarian—much like human speech.

Our earliest ancestors, the Australopithecines, lived in groups of 50 or so, comparable to the size of social groups of modern baboons living in similar environments. As hominin social groups grew to number about 100

to 120 individuals, as is believed to be the case with *Homo erectus*, grooming would have taken up 25 to 30 percent of each individual's time. (Dunbar does not believe *Homo erectus* could speak, at least not until late in its evolutionary trajectory.)²⁶

The apogee of human social group size reached 150 individuals a few hundred thousand years ago. Dunbar asserts that the number is about the same number of friendships we are capable of maintaining, and he cites evidence across a broad range of disciplines, from Mormon history to military science, to corroborate this number.²⁷ In other words, we live, work, socialize and go to war in groups about three times the size of the social groups of Lucy of Olduvai. It so happens that we can also chat and interact with about three people at a time. Speech arose, Dunbar asserts, to replace social grooming in larger social groups as the time and energy costs of picking dander out of each other's hair all day rose to become untenable. The size of the neocortex of the primate brain rose with each increase in social group size; our brains enlarged to manage increasingly complex social interactions.²⁸ Not just language, but the entire architecture of the human mind, evolved to free us from the burden of spending half our waking hours dressing each other's hair.

It's an interesting and popular theory, one that has filtered its way into popular mainstream media.²⁹ As popular as Robin Dunbar's ideas have become, not all scholars are convinced. One such scholar I'll talk about at some length is the French polymath Jean-Louis Dessalles, a computer scientist in the field of artificial intelligence who has written persuasively on evolution and anthropology.

Conversation makes humans unique—but *why*?

Imagine the following conversation, to which we will return later in our discussion of Jean-Louis Dessalles' excellent book *Why We Talk*: I tell my companion, "I was getting my sideburns trimmed by a very chatty, very young stylist with a ton of tattoos yesterday. I was looking to turn the conversation away from myself and I noticed she had a tattoo of an antique egg beater on her arm, so I said, 'You like to cook?' and she said, 'No, it's just a personal thing. I'm a vegan. I don't even eat eggs,' and looked really sad. I think I made her cry. She hardly said another word. It was so awkward."

My companion wrinkles her nose. "I'd cry if I had an eggbeater tattooed on my arm," she says.

“I dunno,” I say. “She was really sad. Maybe her grandmother had an eggbeater like that.”

My companion says, “She's sad because she got a bunch of ironic hipster tattoos and now she's stuck working at The Cut Hut and can't pay to get them removed.”

“I dunno,” I say. “You can make good money cutting hair.”

“Not if you can't cut even sideburns,” says my companion. “Did she say anything about how gray they're getting? You could get her to color them for you. Probably better to go someplace else, though.”

“No, she was just really, really sad,” I say. “It was so weird. Are they uneven?”

“A little,” says my companion. “You can fix it.”

“Probably better to go someplace else,” I say. “I'm not going to color them, though.”

“Good,” says my companion. “I like them gray.”

From a fashion standpoint, an eggbeater tattoo is offbeat, but not unheard of.³⁰ From a conversational standpoint, remarking on an awkward moment with a chatty stranger is not unusual at all. From the standpoint of an animal behaviorist, though, this conversation is utterly unique. It involves the casual exchange of non-survival information, something other animals don't do. It involves pointing out an unusual detail—something other primates don't do. Finally, it contains no less than three kinds purposes for language use—one type that our ancestors probably engaged in two million years ago, and another two types available, as far as we know, only to modern humans.

Most animals communicate. Dogs bark; birds sing. Even invertebrates communicate. Bees signal the location of food sources to their sisters in the hive; an octopus signals agitation or disturbance by turning red.³¹ No other species, though, communicates the way humans do. Compared to other animals, humans not only spend a remarkable amount of time communicating, but communicate *unique* utterances about seemingly *unnecessary* things. Signaling directions to food sources to other bees, if you are a bee, or signaling to a predator that you are a *very* cross octopus right now and not to be trifled with, if you are an octopus, are matters of survival. Human conversation only rarely touches on matters as weighty as the things animals communicate about. Dessalles points

out in *Why We Talk* that no other species does anything remotely like what we do, and we do it all day long.³²

“[N]o other species,” notes Dessalles, “devotes so much time to exchanges of messages which are always new and different from one another.”³³ But *why*? Humans *do* use language to engage in philosophical reflection, to coordinate public works projects, and to develop advanced systems of abstract knowledge, but Dessalles isn't buying arguments that we evolved language *for* any of that. Mostly we use language for just chatting, and that is precisely what language evolved for.³⁴ To understand the importance of all this conversation, Dessalles says we must look beyond the content of our conversations, which usually isn't all that important, to the function and structure of all this conversation, which is a question of vital human importance.

The rules of conversation are paramount to understanding its function. Dan Sperber and Dierdre Wilson argue that speakers strive for relevance. The more new knowledge the speaker offers the listener—that is, the greater number of new deductions an utterance allows the listener to extrapolate—the more relevant the utterance. Dessalles sees value in taking a cognitive approach, but doesn't believe they explain the real mechanisms by which humans decide which information humans choose to share in conversation.³⁵

For Dessalles, the real key to understanding relevance lies in humans' instinctive, intuitive sense of probability. An unusual event or an improbable but nonetheless true piece of information will be judged to be more relevant than something typical or ordinary; an event temporally, spatially or socially near to the speaker and listener will be judged more relevant than something that occurs at a remove. Dessalles calls this quality “salience.”³⁶ Presented with an event a speaker deems salient—an event both unusual and connected in some way to the parties in conversation—a listener may affirm the salience of the event (e.g., “Huh! That *is* strange.”) Alternately, the listener may trivialize the utterance, that is, offer evidence to suggest that the facts are not at all out of the ordinary.

Trivialization, of course, isn't the only kind of contention that goes on in the back-and-forth of conversation. Dessalles would describe trivialization as belonging to the informative mode, which is essentially probabilistic. This was my companion's reaction in the hypothetical conversation about the stylist—a *lot* of young people get tattoos that don't

mean anything in particular, and the woman was probably just sad because she's realized how much they limit her prospects.³⁷

Dessalles also describes explanatory argumentation. Trivialization is distinct from argumentation; argumentation involves logical explanation. Our hominin ancestors had access to the informative mode in their protolanguage, but *Homo sapiens* is probably the only species ever to use argumentation.³⁸ One type of explanatory argumentation involves offering evidence as to why puzzling things are as they are; the other type of explanatory Dessalles identifies involves reaching an agreed-upon solution to a problem.³⁹ In my hypothetical conversation, I was attempting to engage in the first type of argumentation. I identified a puzzling situation (a vegan had an eggbeater tattooed on her arm, which seemed connected to something sad.) I sought an explanation: "Maybe her grandmother had an eggbeater like that." My companion chose the second form of explanatory argumentation. She identified a problem (the substandard quality of my haircuts and my perceived interest in the stylist) and gave supporting evidence (that my sideburns are uneven and that I'm a little old to be chatting up Tattoo Girl in the first place, whether my companion likes it or not.) Recognizing that my companion found my perceived interest in the stylist to be the salient detail, I wisely agreed to her proposed solution ("Probably better to go someplace else.")

Dessalles draws on the work of other researchers to show the importance, and uniqueness, of salience in human interaction. Nearly any human infant will start to point out salient events or objects by the time he or she is a year old; developmental and comparative psychologist Michael Tomasello, who researches the origins of human consciousness, has found that no other primate does this at all. Dessalles argues that human children identify, and within a few short years readily report and discuss salient events so universally and uniformly without teaching or prompting that humans probably have an "informative reflex" that drives them to point out salient things. This instinct, he postulates, probably dates back two million years to *Homo erectus* and was the driving force behind the creation of the first protolanguage, a system of signs without syntax that allowed humans to point out salient events to other members of the social group.⁴⁰

If we accept that ordinary conversation is the real purpose of human language, and that an "informative reflex" is the force that drives conversation, the question remains: *why?* It's not enough for language to be useful; as a scientist, Dessalles' task is to identify a pathway by which this singularly bizarre specialized behavior would have arisen in one

species under the rules of Darwinian evolution. It turns out that pointing out salient events to other members of your own species is an evolutionarily paradoxical behavior. *Hearers*, not speakers, gain the apparent advantage of acquiring salient information and having unexplained events explained without investing their own effort.⁴¹

Dessalles' discusses, and dismisses, Robin Dunbar's theory of social bonding. Dunbar posits that human language arose to replace primate grooming behavior as our ancestors began to live in social groups too large for grooming to function as a mechanism of social cohesion. For Dessalles, language is just too complicated and costly—if mutual acknowledgement and reassurance were all that was needed, a much simpler system of primate gesture-calls would function very nicely.⁴²

Language is an altruistic endeavor. Hearers take risks to obtain information and share it freely. This is problematic from an evolutionary standpoint. If all the advantage adheres to the hearers, there is no way the behavior would continue. From an evolutionary perspective, advantage must adhere to the speakers. If the apparently altruistic system of language is really a cooperative system, in which speakers give information to hearers expecting reciprocity, there arises the problem of cheating. Hearers with no means to check the veracity of what a speaker is saying have no reason to share information reciprocally; the model breaks down.⁴³

A good deal of the conversational behavior we've already discussed fills the need for hearers to assess the truthfulness of speakers. The back-and-forth of trivialization and argumentation are part of the way that hearers, as “buyers” of information, test the merchandise of speakers, for it is hearers who bear the real risk if they accept false information as true. This, though, imposes another risk on speakers—speakers bear the risk of having untrue statements found out as untrue, or, absent intent to deceive, that their salient utterances will be pointed out as not at all relevant and hence of low value to listeners.⁴⁴

Animals build coalitions. Wolves build coalitions against moose; crows build coalitions against hawks. Dessalles points out that humans must build coalitions against other groups of humans more than anything else. It is in the political nature of language—the utility of language for creating hierarchical groups of humans aligned opposite other groups—that Dessalles places the evolutionary origins of human speech. Dessalles ultimately solves the evolutionary paradox of reciprocity by observing that speakers

do not speak so that they will be reciprocally rewarded with information from their hearers.⁴⁵ The real reward accorded speakers is status—status that ultimately determines, in Darwinian terms, their prospects for survival and reproduction. Hearers who accord status to speakers are in turn rewarded with membership in a coalition, for in a coalition, while more advantages may accrue to some, some advantages accrue to all, and a lower hierarchical position in a thriving coalition may provide the greatest advantage with lowest risk. As Dessalles puts it, “It is better to stand second in a coalition that wins than first in a coalition that loses.”⁴⁶

If conversation is the social glue that holds human social groups together, I do not think it is expecting too much to expect students to spread a bit of that glue out further into the school community. The list of the types of information that make up most human speech—likes and dislikes, talk about daily activities, talk about what others are doing and about social relationships--will sound familiar to most language teachers. It's a pretty good summary of what introductory language learners learn to talk about in the first two semesters.⁴⁷ Communication at this level is the glue that holds our social groups together and, according to leading theorists, is precisely the task our students' massive brains evolved to master. If we can effectively encourage students to use the languages they learn to engage native speakers in their own schools and neighborhoods in simple greeting and conversation, I believe the results for both language learning and for our communities might be surprising. Students, as I said before, can do a very great deal with two semesters of a modern language.

Keeping it Real: Strategies for Teaching

My strategies for teaching this unit will be based on the principle of allowing real world necessity to guide practice. If two-thirds of natural human speech is about likes and dislikes, social relationships, and the doings of people known to both speaker and listener, it stands to reason that the majority of speaking practice for introductory learners should be on these same topics. Furthermore, I should prompt speech that mirrors as closely as possible the speech I actually expect students to use—not six years from now, in some hypothetical work situation, but today or tomorrow with other Spanish speakers in their community, and presumably at their own school.

Real, Not Hypothetical

There are perfectly rational reasons for the extensive use of hypothetical prompts in World Language teaching and assessment. First, it allows teachers to construct by artifice a scenario that will cover a specific set of targeted vocabulary and grammar objectives. Second, it allows for a higher degree of uniformity in assessment. Students vary widely in their personal experiences and social relationships, but teachers can be assured of a degree of uniformity in the content, if not quality, of responses when each student is handed an identical prompt.

There are significant drawbacks to constructed hypothetical scenarios as well. Most notably, they discourage students from speaking authentically about the one subject they are most interested in—their own lives and social situations. My first strategy will be, wherever possible, to move away from constructed hypothetical prompts for speaking and towards encouraging students to actually communicate meaningfully about themselves and their real lives in the ways they would realistically speak with the native users of the target language they are most likely to encounter.

Here, Not Abroad

An unforgivable percentage of speaking and writing prompts in our World Languages curriculum begin along the lines of, “*Imagine you are studying abroad for a semester in Valencia, Spain...*” The majority of my students are on free and reduced lunch. When we tell them, “*Imagine you are studying abroad...*” we’re really telling them two things: “*Imagine you are taking a course designed specifically for privileged people whose social realities, economic situations, needs and aspirations are wholly alien to your own,*” and “*Imagine the Spanish-speakers really worth talking to are comfortable middle- and upper-class people abroad, and not the children of immigrants you ride the bus with every day.*”

Do I want a larger percentage of my students to study abroad? Absolutely. Does financial aid exist to help students on free and reduced lunch realize the dream of studying abroad? Yes, it does. Yet, I train students to speak Spanish, and some of them will study abroad. I do not train students to speak Spanish *so* that they may study abroad. My expectation is that they will learn Spanish *here* and speak it *here* with people who are *here*.

Travel abroad is a reasonable middle- and even working-class goal; economical fares abroad are readily available, and a week in a rental vacation flat shared with friends can be had for less than a cell phone upgrade. There is value in exercises that encourage students to envision

travel abroad along with the (often modest) goals they will need to set in order to make such travel a reality. Nonetheless, communicative prompts will be heavily weighted towards modeling actual communication in the home community.

Now, Not In Level Three

The two most-repeated complaints I hear among World Languages teachers are, first, that too many students are coming out of the lower levels unprepared for the rigors of level three and higher and, second, that *not enough* of the (presumably equally ill-prepared) students are taking upper-level classes. Vertical integration of curricula is an important goal *for teachers*. Recruitment for upper-level courses is an important goal *for teachers*. Neither is a particularly meaningful goal for students.

Teaching under the principle that communication modeled in the classroom will be replicated in the school community, students will learn target content so they can meaningfully use it *now*, not because it will prove useful to them later in a higher level of the course. If students actually learn and use novice-level Spanish outside the confines of the classroom, they will be exposed to higher levels of authentic speech. They will also have greater exposure to and comfort level with the target culture and language. From the teaching perspective, better recruitment and better vertical alignment are crucial. From the perspective of the learner, meaningful use of the target language in the present is the missing component. For any target content we hope for students to retain for the next level, we should create opportunities for meaningful and authentic use in the present.

Now, Not In 1990

One last complaint I hear from students is that communicative prompts in World Language classes frequently ask them to perform tasks that are either socially or technologically out of date. For example, we spend most of a unit teaching students to order in a restaurant, but in most immigrant communities and in most tourist areas abroad one will have to expend considerable effort to find a dining spot where the staff do not have sufficient command of English or familiarity with English speakers to make ordering in a restaurant possible without any command of Spanish at all. Likewise, in the unit on getting around town and asking for directions, students consistently ask me, “What is it with the people in these lessons? Doesn't anyone have a cell phone? We're constantly asking strangers for

the time and for directions. They have to be wondering why we don't just look at our phones.”

To maintain the relevance of curricula for students, I believe it important to avoid asking students to perform unrealistic tasks. When we ask students to do something like ask for directions or order in a restaurant, we should make it explicit that we are using the target language not because we *have to*, which is somewhat unrealistic, but to demonstrate to our listeners that we *can* and *wish to*. We are using the target language to demonstrate to native speakers of the language that we have expended considerable effort to gain a modicum of understanding of their language and ways of life—and thereby build rapport. To a lesser extent, we also demonstrate our relevance and social mastery to our English-speaking peers by using the target language with native speakers when we don't actually have to. This could, of course, be called showing off—but showing off is no trivial matter to teenagers, nor, if we are honest, to adults. There can be considerable social value in the right kind of showing off done well.

Classroom Activities: How Does Knowing Why People Speak Change a World Languages Classroom?

We've established that according to the leading theories on the evolution of human language, the main reasons people speak are to establish one's place in a social hierarchy or to foster human social bonding and cohesion. To my view, these are the same process viewed from different angles. From Dessalles' viewpoint, the purpose of speech is to seize one's place in the pecking order; from Dunbar's, it is to foster the formation of social bonds. In the end, the rank one achieves in a social hierarchy will depend on the number and quality of one's social bonds, and on the specific individuals with whom one forms them. Dunbar and Dessalles are really not so much at odds at all, regardless of whether one sees primate grooming patterns as having played an important role in the process that brought us to the language we use today.

Having arrived at this conclusion for the present—that the primary and original purpose of human language was to facilitate the organization of a social hierarchy *through* the creation of social bonds—how does that influence the way we go about structuring the day-to-day activities of a World Languages classroom? I believe we will spend a good deal less time discouraging students from doing the one thing they want most to do—spend the whole period talking to each other about nothing in particular--since the importance lies not in what is said but in who can command the

attention of his or her peers. We will spend a good deal more time and effort getting them to do this very thing in the target language. Don't celebrate yet; there are good reasons for why getting them to say whatever they want in the target language will be much harder than getting them to shut up for a moment and listen to us say what we want. It goes beyond the students being lazy, which, of course, they are.

When I say the students are lazy, I mean that they assiduously avoid extraneous effort. They prioritize their fundamental developmental task of learning to navigate a social hierarchy over the comparatively abstract (and evolutionarily recent) task of learning a complex and difficult skill for which they have little pressing need while sitting still under ghastly fluorescent lighting. This is to be expected, and it's a lot to work against. It gets worse, though. When we note that students will avoid speaking the target language at almost all costs, even when they know perfectly well how to say something, and will speak English unless compelled, we've gone beyond noting that they're lazy. We've picked up on a fundamental feature of language development.

In *The Unfolding of Language*, Guy Deutscher explains two fundamental forces that seem to be ingrained or innate features of the human apparatus for language. The forces of expressiveness lead humans to seek greater and greater precision in our speech. We build up lovely Byzantine systems like the Latin case system to say exactly what we mean with precision and specificity.⁴⁸

At the same time—and this is the force that really concerns us here—forces of destruction drive us to seek the greatest economy in our speech. We *tear down* and discard creaking edifices of case systems. We run words together and create new words and even grammatical elements. We even shift consonants from comparatively difficult (from the standpoint of our oral-facial musculature) ones to relatively easy ones. Ever wonder why we say *padre* in Spanish but *father* in English? The consonant /p/ is comparatively difficult compared to /f/, and languages around the world will quite spontaneously undergo massive shifts of /p/ sounds to /f/ sounds.⁴⁹ The forces of destruction are really the forces of parsimony, and they never rest.

The forces of economy of expression, though, may well be termed forces of destruction with regard to our aims in the classroom. When students left to speak in spontaneous interaction in interpersonal speaking activities shift into English every time the teacher is more than two desks away, they are obeying a fundamental principle of the human language apparatus: seek the

mode of expression that requires the least effort. If speaking English is easier and there is no compelling reason to do otherwise, students will switch to English? Yes, they are being lazy (with attention to what we mean by lazy; see above), but it's more than that. They're doing what humans do when they communicate, almost always and almost everywhere.

This piece of understanding about the *how* of language development, rather than the *why*, should impress upon us the need for a robust system of checks to keep students speaking the language we wish them to speak. These may rob student speech of some of the spontaneity we're driving for, but so be it. A group of English-dominant students *will* speak English unless given a compelling reason not to. I've found over fifteen years of monitoring interpersonal speaking activities that I have to keep moving around the classroom to keep the students speaking Spanish with each other. There is about a six-foot radius around the teacher, the Ring of Linguistic Fidelity, within which students will speak Spanish. Outside that ring—the range at which the teacher, in an overcrowded room full of people speaking all at once, can ascertain not only *that* people are speaking in English but *who* is speaking it—most students can reasonably be assumed to be speaking English during a whole class interpersonal speaking activity. Fortunately, common technology relatively accessible to most of us will make the task of expanding the Ring of Linguistic Fidelity to embrace all of our students much easier. We won't be successful with all of our students all the time, but should be able to encourage a degree of linguistic fidelity with most of them some of the time and some of them all the time.

Social Glue: *Pasar el rato*

Pasar el rato, to pass the time, can be loosely translated as “hanging out.” In the *pasar el rato* exercise, students assemble in student-selected pairs or groups to talk, beginning on a given topic for a set amount of time. Conversations are recorded and automatically transcribed. Unlike formal assessment, students are not scored on a rubric like the PALS rubric. Students are merely expected to maintain linguistically and socially appropriate interaction for a given amount of time.

This activity will allow students to make small talk—probably the most important skill they'll learn in the introductory levels of language instruction—and interact with their peers. We can work against their natural tendency to speak English during such activities with any number of technological aids. Recording the conversations digitally for later teacher review is one option and could be achieved using any number of tools, from

the voice recorder app available on most cell phones to Audacity, a desktop audio application many of my peers use. I strongly encourage, though, the use of digital audio tools that provide transcription. Reviewing the work of eleven groups of three students, with each group speaking five minutes, by means of audio recording will take a minimum of fifty-five minutes. Multiply that by three to represent the number of classes most of each teach and that brings the teacher time invested in assessment to 165 minutes. That's nearly three hours of review time for a five-minute informal assessment—not a practical use of our resources. With transcription, a teacher can very quickly glance through text to confirm that students were meeting the primary objective, that of sustaining interaction in the target language.

For a classroom in which the overwhelming majority of students are holders of smart phones, Google Voice may be a good tool to use. Having set up a Google Voice account, the students can make conference calls to one another in the group. If they set their default language to Spanish, Google Voice will transcribe their conversation with reasonable fidelity. (If they do not, Google Voice will attempt to render their conversation into incomprehensible English. It's entertaining but not terribly useful, except that the teacher will know that wherever the transcript stops reading like stream of consciousness slam poetry the students were speaking in actual English.)

For classes in which many students do not have smart phones, or classes in which the teacher does not wish for students to have phones out at all (an entirely prudent approach), free online apps such as Online Dictation (<https://dictation.io>) and Transcribe (<https://transcribe.wreally.com>) used in conjunction with a school laptop cart should serve well. A full set of microphones or headphone with mic sets will be required.

For assessment of the *Pasar el rato* activity, teachers will check transcripts and will spot-check voice recordings for fidelity to the language of instruction. Teachers will set goals for duration of successful interaction based on the results. The goal will be to increase both comprehensible input and output as well as raising students' capacity for sustained interaction. For this activity, teachers need not go into a detailed assessment of students' language control, vocabulary use and level of discourse with the use of a formal rubric.

Social Lubricant: *El ascensor*

In the *El ascensor* activity, students will imagine they are in an elevator with a talkative stranger. Groupings will be set by the teacher. Informal assessment of interpersonal speaking in which the partner is a peer, but not necessarily a friend, will scaffold the students' interpersonal speaking experience and build them up for higher-stress activities such as a conversation with a teacher that will be scored for a formal grade on a rubric. Expectations for length and sophistication of sustained language production will be lower. The focus will be on use of memorized words and social formulae. This work may be scored on an interpersonal speaking rubric. However, rather than having teachers score each conversation on a rubric, I'd encourage the teacher to give students the rubric and demonstrate how to use it. For the *El ascensor* activity, students should score their own transcripts or recordings in groups and compare their scoring of their work to their neighbors'. With a good rubric, students will develop an intuitive understanding of what represents good speech at their level of linguistic development.

To ensure linguistic fidelity—to make sure, once again, that students are actually staying in the target language—this activity should ideally be transcribed or recorded in a format that can be turned in or electronically submitted. Spot-checking by the teacher, rather than formal evaluation of each piece of work by the teacher, should be sufficient to keep the activity productive provided students have their own use of the rubric for self-evaluation adequately reinforced.

Building Community: *Mi pasaporte*

Imagine yourself a math teacher. Now imagine that at your school you have on the premises anywhere from a dozen to a couple hundred highly trained mathematicians. However, rather than leveraging the talents of the mathematicians you have on campus, your department chooses to organize a yearly trip to a mathematics conference abroad for the dozen or so students whose families can muster three thousand dollars or so in expenses for the enriching experience. Sounds ridiculous, right? That's exactly the approach we take in World Languages, though. In the case of Spanish, most schools today have on the premises dozens—or up to hundreds—of students with expert command of spoken Spanish. Very seldom are their talents put to use as an educational asset for the students wishing to learn their language. For students who don't have the option of ponying up thousands of dollars for study abroad, taking a few moments to speak with native speakers who sit next to them every day in school should prove a practical and economical option.

In the *Mi pasaporte* activity, students will make a booklet that is their passport. On each page, they visit a different country by interviewing a native speaker about everyday topics aligned to the content of the current unit in the course. For example, in a unit on leisure activities, the “passport” might have three pages devoted to interviews on leisure activities. On each page, students will write down the name of their interviewee along with brief biographical details such as age and place of origin along with a physical description. Students then ask teacher-provided questions appropriate to the current unit such as “How do you spend your free time? Do you like to play video games? Which one is your favorite?”--all in the target language, of course. I picture three pages per unit; my Spanish curriculum divides the course into four units.

That isn't a tremendous amount of time for Anglophone students to spend over the course of a year individually speaking with native speakers of Spanish at their own schools, but I believe it would represent an enormous increase from what students currently enjoy. Twelve separate interactions per student, over thirty-odd students in six courses per teacher per year, would cumulatively make a huge impact on casual interaction between Anglophone students and their Spanish-speaking peers. I think the impact on school climate would be a welcome and healthy one.

At the end of each unit, students would submit their “passports” to the teacher for review. Because of the extraordinary likelihood of students losing their “passports”, teachers may wish to construct the assignment as an electronically stored portfolio. In such a format, students could actually make an audio recording of their interview part of the portfolio, and teachers could use the “passport” assignment for presenting evidence of student growth.

Resources

Resources for Teacher Use

Deutscher, Guy. *The Unfolding of Language: An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005.

I would call this book a must-read for any teacher of language, whether World Languages or English. Written as much for popular audiences as for scholars, this witty and engaging book gives an expansive overview of how the languages we teach and learn developed, diverged, and acquired their irregularities and quirks.

Resources for Classroom Use

PALS Rubrics: Performance Assessment for Language Students

The PALS rubrics developed by Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia are among the best tools for scoring student language production I have encountered. The PALS rubrics have been adopted by other districts, including my own, and enjoy broad circulation. One of the most useful features of the PALS rubrics is that their conciseness and simplicity allow teachers very readily to train students in their use. When students are given regular practice with their language production and are allowed to score their work and that of other students using the same rubric the teacher will use, they are able to identify the specific areas they need to work on in order to improve their language production. Students' close familiarity with the scoring rubric also decreases student anxiety about testing and increases supports student confidence in the fairness of grading. The PALS rubrics are available for download and use here:

<http://www.fcps.edu/is/worldlanguages/pals/>

Google Voice

Google Voice, Google's online voicemail platform (www.google.com/voice), is free for student and teacher use and can be leveraged as an easily accessed platform for recording and transcribing student language production. By changing default language settings, a user can readily transcribe recorded messages or conversations in most language taught in our schools. Using Google Voice in the classroom avoids the need for checking out a laptop cart or reserving a computer lab when doing work that calls for a digital recording—students can access Google Voice through a piece of technology most high school students already carry, a cell phone.

Standards⁵⁰

Connections to Language and Literacy, Novice High

NH.CLL.1.1. Use simple phrases and short sentences to exchange information about familiar topics.

NH.CLL.1.2. Generate conversations using familiar vocabulary and structures in short social interactions.

NH.CLL.1.3. Generate responses to familiar questions, statements, commands, or other stimuli.

NH.CLL.1.4. Use simple questions about familiar topics to acquire needed information.

A consistent focus on making small talk throughout the course of Levels I and II of a modern World Languages course will more than adequately address the Connections to Language and Literacy standards. The features of what we call “small talk”—short and typically formulaic interactions on familiar topics—are precisely the kind of conversation these standards address at the introductory level. As so-called “small talk” makes up the bulk of human speech, a Novice High level of interpersonal speaking proficiency actually prepares students for much broader range of social interaction than most teachers appreciate.

Communities, Novice High

NH.CMT.1.1. Use simple phrases and short sentences in short social interactions.

NH.CMT.1.2. Carry out short interactions on familiar topics, such as family, friends, and activities, *with people from the target culture* [emphasis added] or communities of learners of the same target language.

The *Mi pasaporte* activity is specifically designed to help teachers address the Communities’ standards in a meaningful and prosocial way. Most schools include communities of speakers of at least one of the World Languages taught there, and many schools contain speakers of more than one of the World Languages taught. Interaction with members of target linguistic communities at their own schools and in their own neighborhoods is a readily attainable goal for most students, as compared to study abroad. Furthermore, treating heritage and native speakers of languages other than English as subject matter experts will help welcome and integrate often

marginalized groups of students who may feel disconnected from the wider school community.

Appendix 1: Classroom Activities

Content matter in the weeks leading up to doing the speaking exercises should cover regional differences in Latin cuisines, a topic that could readily be covered by using menus from different restaurants as authentic reading samples in reading exercises.

Pasar el rato

I include here an outline of the *Pasar el rato* interpersonal speaking activities I propose for Spanish II, Unit 2, which deals with food and restaurant terminology. These prompts differ from the speaking prompts used in my current curriculum in that they encourage students to offer opinions and challenge others' statements, rather than simply engaging in an exchange of information.

Students will work in groups of three.

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 1 *Pasar el rato*

Instructions:

You are having a conversation with friends about the weekend. One of you went to a Dominican restaurant and enjoyed it very much.

Student 1: Name _____

You went to Three Amigos, a Mexican restaurant owned by Dominicans.

You ordered one of the Dominican items off the menu and enjoyed it very much.

Student 2: Name _____

You do not think you would like Dominican food. You talk about the restaurants you prefer.

Student 3: Name _____

You like Latin food and want to go to Three Amigos.

As a group, you should speak for **three minutes in Spanish**. Once you have covered the items in the prompt you may move on to other topics, but you must speak for three minutes. Using your Chromebook, go to Online

Dictation and select Spanish. Record a transcript of your conversation, passing the microphone to each person when it is that person's turn to speak. Save a copy of the conversation and share it with the teacher using Google Drive.

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 3 *Pasar el rato*

Instructions:

You are having a conversation with friends about the weekend. One of you went to a Dominican restaurant and enjoyed it very much.

Student 1: Name _____

You went to Three Amigos, a Mexican restaurant owned by Dominicans. You ordered one of the Dominican items off the menu and enjoyed it very much. People say the food is very authentic. Tell about some Dominican foods you ate there.

Student 2: Name _____

You have a friend who is Dominican. Her mother says there is no authentic Dominican food in Charlotte except at her house. Talk about the food you prefer.

Student 3: Name _____

You have also heard the Dominican items at Three Amigos are good. You have a friend who is Dominican who goes there with his family. You want to try it. Talk about the food you enjoy.

As a group, you should speak for **three minutes in Spanish**. Once you have covered the items in the prompt you may move on to other topics, but you must speak for three minutes. Using your Chromebook, go to Online Dictation and select Spanish. Record a transcript of your conversation, passing the microphone to each person when it is that person's turn to speak. Save a copy of the conversation and share it with the teacher using Google Drive.

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 3 *Pasar el rato*

Instructions:

Student 1: Name _____

You went to Three Amigos, a Mexican restaurant owned by Dominicans. You ordered one of the Dominican items off the menu and enjoyed it very much. People say the food is very authentic. Tell about some Dominican foods you ate there.

Student 2: Name _____

*You prefer Mexican food. Name a Mexican restaurant and talk about the Mexican dishes you prefer. **You may not mention Taco Bell or tacos.***

Student 3: Name _____

You have also heard the Dominican items at Three Amigos are good. You want to try it. Personally, you prefer Cuban food. Mention some Cuban food you enjoy.

As a group, you should speak for **four minutes in Spanish**. Once you have covered the items in the prompt you may move on to other topics, but you must speak for three minutes. Using your Chromebook, go to Online Dictation and select Spanish. Record a transcript of your conversation, passing the microphone to each person when it is that person's turn to speak. Save a copy of the conversation and share it with the teacher using Google Drive.

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 4 *Pasar el rato*

Instructions:

Student 1: Name _____

You went to Three Amigos, a Mexican restaurant owned by Dominicans. You ordered some of the Dominican items off the menu and enjoyed it very much. People say the food is very authentic. Tell about some Dominican foods you ate there.

Student 2: Name _____

You have also heard that Three Amigos is good. You prefer Salvadoran food. Tell about a Salvadoran food you enjoy. You would like to find a good Salvadoran restaurant.

Student 3: Name _____

You also like Salvadoran food. You ate at a Salvadoran restaurant in Davidson, but you do not remember the name. You also like to go to Three Amigos, but you prefer the Mexican food.

As a group, you should speak for **five minutes in Spanish**. Once you have covered the items in the prompt you may move on to other topics, but you must speak for three minutes. Using your Chromebook, go to Online Dictation and select Spanish. Record a transcript of your conversation, passing the microphone to each person when it is that person's turn to speak. Save a copy of the conversation and share it with the teacher using Google Drive.

El ascensor

I include here an outline of the *Pasar el rato* interpersonal speaking activities I propose for Spanish II, Unit 2, which deals with food and restaurant terminology.

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 1 *El ascensor*

Instructions:

Student 1: Name _____

You are working in your first job after finishing school. You are currently working on the 24th floor of an office building. Because you are the junior person there, whenever you work late you are expected to make the run to pick up dinner. Tonight you are bringing back food from Lempira, a Central American restaurant. A passenger in the elevator, some kind of big shot, will ask you about the food you are carrying. Be sure to tell the person where you got the food.

<http://www.lempirarestaurants.com/menu/honduran/>

Student 2: Name _____

You are one of Charlotte's top corporate tax attorneys with the firm of Johnson Martinez and Park, L.L.C. You just went down to the lobby to pick up a suit. There's a geeky kid on the elevator with a great big bag full of food that smells crazy good. Be sure to ask the kid about it.

As a pair, you should speak for **two minutes in Spanish**. Once you have covered the items in the prompt you may move on to other topics, but you must speak for two minutes. Using your Chromebook, go to Online Dictation and select Spanish. Record a transcript of your conversation, passing the microphone to each person when it is that person's turn to

speak. Save a copy of the conversation and share it with the teacher using Google Drive.

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 2 *El ascensor*

Instructions:

Student 1: Name _____

You are working in your first job after finishing school. You are currently working on the 24th floor of an office building. Because you are the junior person there, whenever you work late you are expected to make the run to pick up dinner. Tonight you are bringing back food from Lempira, a Central American restaurant. Your boss ordered Honduran for everyone. A passenger in the elevator, some kind of big shot, will ask you about the food you are carrying. Tell the passenger about some of the foods you are bringing back. Be sure to tell the person where you got the food.

<http://www.lempirarestaurants.com/menu/honduran/>

Student 2: Name _____

You are one of Charlotte's top corporate tax attorneys with the firm of Johnson Martinez and Park, L.L.C. You just went down to the lobby to pick up a suit. There's a geeky kid on the elevator with a great big bag full of food that smells crazy good. You grew up in Argentina and don't know anything about the Latin food people eat here; you assume everyone eats Mexican food. Be sure to ask the kid about it.

As a pair, you should speak for **two minutes in Spanish**. Once you have covered the items in the prompt you may move on to other topics, but you must speak for two minutes. Using your Chromebook, go to Online Dictation and select Spanish. Record a transcript of your conversation, passing the microphone to each person when it is that person's turn to speak. Save a copy of the conversation and share it with the teacher using Google Drive.

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 3 *El ascensor*

Instructions:

Student 1: Name _____

You are working in your first job after finishing school. You are currently working on the 24th floor of an office building. Because you are the junior person there, whenever you work late you are expected to make the run to pick up dinner. Tonight you are bringing back food from Lempira, a Central American restaurant. Your boss ordered Honduran for everyone. A passenger in the elevator, some kind of big shot, will ask you about the food you are carrying. Tell the passenger about some of the foods you are bringing back. Be ready to explain some differences between Honduran and Mexican food. Be sure to tell the person where you got the food.

<http://www.lempirarestaurants.com/menu/honduran/>

Student 2: Name _____

You are one of Charlotte's top corporate tax attorneys with the firm of Johnson Martinez and Park, L.L.C. You just went down to the lobby to pick up a suit. There's a geeky kid on the elevator with a great big bag full of food that smells crazy good. You grew up in Argentina and don't know anything about the Latin food people eat here; you assume everyone eats Mexican food. Ask about the difference between Mexican and Honduran food.

As a pair, you should speak for **three minutes in Spanish**. Once you have covered the items in the prompt you may move on to other topics, but you must speak for three minutes. Using your Chromebook, go to Online Dictation and select Spanish. Record a transcript of your conversation, passing the microphone to each person when it is that person's turn to speak. Save a copy of the conversation and share it with the teacher using Google Drive.

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 4 *El ascensor*

Instructions:

Student 1: Name _____

You are working in your first job after finishing school. You are currently working on the 24th floor of an office building. Because you are the junior person there, whenever you work late you are expected to make the run to pick up dinner. Tonight you are bringing back food from Lempira, a Central American restaurant. Your boss ordered Honduran for everyone.

A passenger in the elevator, some kind of big shot, will ask you about the food you are carrying. Tell the passenger about some of the foods you are bringing back. Be ready to explain some differences between Honduran and Mexican food. Ask your fellow passenger about the food from the passenger's culture. <http://www.lempirarestaurants.com/menu/honduran/>

Student 2: Name _____

You are one of Charlotte's top corporate tax attorneys with the firm of Johnson Martinez and Park, L.L.C. You just went down to the lobby to pick up a suit. There's a geeky kid on the elevator with a great big bag full of food that smells crazy good. You grew up in Argentina and don't know anything about the Latin food people eat here; you assume everyone eats Mexican food. Ask about the difference between Mexican and Honduran food. Be ready to talk about food from Argentina.

As a pair, you should speak for **three minutes in Spanish**. Once you have covered the items in the prompt you may move on to other topics, but you must speak for three minutes. Using your Chromebook, go to Online Dictation and select Spanish. Record a transcript of your conversation, passing the microphone to each person when it is that person's turn to speak. Save a copy of the conversation and share it with the teacher using Google Drive.

Mi pasaporte

For the *Mi pasaporte* exercise, students will keep a small booklet the size of a passport with pages to record results of four interviews with native speakers per unit. Themes for the interviews will correspond to the themes of each unit. Some students suffer from social anxiety and will have difficulty talking to unfamiliar people; others, unfortunately, may have a lack of interest for or active aversion to speaking with native speakers of Spanish. We want to welcome the native speakers of target languages in our schools into the wider school community; *we don't wish to force them to interact with students who clearly don't like them or want to talk to them*. A parallel activity interviewing classmates in Spanish, with added requirements such as a presentation on the target cultural items covered, might suffice. We have to meet students where they are; I strongly encourage any teacher planning to implement this activity to have an alternate activity available for students suffering from social anxiety, cultural bias or other disability.

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 1 *Mi pasaporte*

Interview a native speaker of Spanish in Spanish about food and record your informant's responses.

Name of informant: _____ Age: _____

Where did you meet this person? _____

1. What is your name?
2. Where are your parents from?
3. What is your favorite dish?
4. What is your favorite restaurant?
5. What is your favorite American dish?

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 2 *Mi pasaporte*

Interview a native speaker of Spanish in Spanish about food and record your informant's responses.

Name of informant: _____ Age: _____

Where did you meet this person? _____

1. What is your name?
2. Where are your parents from?
3. What is your favorite dish?
4. What is your favorite restaurant?
5. What is your favorite American dish?
6. Do you eat a lot of junk food?
7. Do you prefer American junk food, or junk food from your own culture?

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 3 *Mi pasaporte*

Interview a native speaker of Spanish in Spanish about food and record your informant's responses.

Name of informant: _____ Age: _____

Where did you meet this person? _____

1. What is your name?
2. Where are your parents from?

3. What is your favorite dish?
4. What is your favorite restaurant?
5. What is your favorite American dish?
6. How often do you eat in a restaurant or buy food to go in a restaurant?
7. How often do your parents or someone else cook a meal for the whole family at home?

Spanish II, Unit 2, Week 4 *Mi pasaporte*

Interview a native speaker of Spanish in Spanish about food and record your informant's responses.

Name of informant: _____ Age: _____

Where did you meet this person? _____

1. What is your name?
2. Where are your parents from?
3. What is your favorite dish?
4. What is your favorite restaurant?
5. What is your favorite American dish?
6. What are some special holiday foods in your culture?
7. At holidays, does your family eat American holiday food, foods from your own culture, or both?

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Flax, Brian. "Does Google Voice Transcribe Spanish? | The Classroom | Synonym." The Classroom. Accessed November 1, 2015.

A guide to using Google Voice's voice message transcription service in languages other than English.

"Goals of Science." Goals of Science. Accessed June 14, 2015.
http://www.ck12.org/biology/Goals-of-Science/lesson/Goals-of-Science/?referrer=concept_details.

An online Biology textbook begins with an entire chapter on the nature and definition of Science.

Harmand, Sonia, Lewis, Jason E., Feibel Craig S., Lepre Christopher J., Prat Sandrine, Lenoble Arnaud, and Boës Xavier. "3.3-million-year-old Stone Tools from Lomekwi 3, West Turkana, Kenya." *Nature* 521, no. 7552 (2015): 310. Accessed September 27, 2015. doi: 5/21/2015.

Stone tools found in Kenya predate the appearance of the genus Homo by 700,000 years.

Holmes, Janet. "Doing Collegiality and Keeping Control at Work: Small Talk in Government Departments." In *Small Talk*, edited by Justine Coupland, 32-61. Harlow, England: Longman, 2000.

This is a very good article on the role of small talk in the workplace. I believe it is a good starting place for anyone interested in the importance of phatic expression and small talk for establishing social cohesion and social hierarchies.

Jirousek, Charlotte. "Art, Design, and Visual Thinking." Art, Design, and Visual Thinking. Accessed June 14, 2015.

An online Art and Design textbook begins with a definition of "art" and "design."

2001, a Space Odyssey. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Warner Home Video, 2001. Film.

A seminal science fiction film that touches on human evolution.

Lunsford, Ron. "Origins of Human Language." Lecture, Charlotte Teachers Institute Origins of Human Language Seminar, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, May 14, 2015.

A seminar for teachers on the origins of human language, the most difficult question in linguistics.

Morelle, Rebecca. "Oldest Stone Tools Pre-date Earliest Humans - BBC News." BBC News. May 20, 2015. Accessed September 27, 2015.

Evidence of stone tool use goes back 3.39 million years, substantially older than the Homo genus.

Seltzer, Leslie J., Ashley R. Prosofski, Toni E. Ziegler, and Seth D. Pollak. "Instant Messages vs. Speech: Hormones and Why We Still Need To Hear Each Other." *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 2012, 42-45.

The study cites hormonal changes caused in response to hearing the speech of loved ones. The authors make a case that the exchange of vocal language, distinct from other types of communication, causes physiological reactions that play a key role in human social bonding.

Seyfarth, Robert M., and Dorothy L. Cheney. "The Evolutionary Origins of Friendship." *Annual Review of Psychology* 63 (2012): 153-77.

The authors outline how analogous patterns of friendship developed in different species of mammals. Friendship offers competitive and survival advantages to males and females across many species of terrestrial mammals.

"World Languages Unpacked Content for Modern Language Programs – High School Credit Courses Levels I-VIII." North Carolina Department of Public

Instruction Instructional Support Tools For Achieving New Standards.
Accessed September 21, 2015.

A list of current standards for instruction in World Languages at the high school level in North Carolina with some explanatory text to clarify the functional level indicated by each standard.

"Eggbeater Tattoo - Google Search." Eggbeater Tattoo - Google Search. Accessed November 22, 2015.

A surprising number of people have eggbeater tattoos.

Žegarac, Vladimir "What Is Phatic Communication?" In *Current Issues in Relevance Theory*, edited by Villy Rouchota, 327-361. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1998.

Vladimir Žegarac offers a clarified definition of phatic utterances, explaining that phatic communication is communication that signals willingness to initiate or maintain a social relationship. While much phatic communication is conventionalized, not all phatic communication is formulaic; it is the function, not the form, of an utterance that qualifies it as phatic.

¹ *2001, a Space Odyssey*. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Warner Home Video, 2001. Film.

² Ron Lunsford. "Origins of Human Language." Lecture, Charlotte Teachers Institute Origins of Human Language Seminar, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, May 14, 2015. Many thanks to Ron Lunsford for reminding me of this scene in the film and of how it both encapsulated and shaped the dominant popular view of human intelligence as having developed to enable technological progress, from the hand axe to the iPhone.

³ Sonia Harmand, Jason E. Lewis, Craig S., Feibel Christopher J. Lepre, Sandrine Prat, Arnaud Lenoble, and Xavier Boës, et al. "3.3-million-year-old Stone Tools from Lomekwi 3, West Turkana, Kenya." *Nature* 521, no. 7552 (2015): 310. Accessed September 27, 2015. doi: 5/21/2015.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Morelle, Rebecca. "Oldest Stone Tools Pre-date Earliest Humans - BBC News." BBC News. May 20, 2015. Accessed September 27, 2015.

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- ⁶ Bruner, Emiliano. "Cranial Shape and Size Variation in Human Evolution: Structural and Functional Perspectives." *Child's Nervous System* 23, no. 12 (2007): 1357-365. Accessed September 27, 2015. doi: 8/7/2007.
- ⁷ Burling, Robbins. *The Talking Ape: How Language Evolved*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 149.
- ⁸ Vladimir Žegarac "What Is Phatic Communication?" In *Current Issues in Relevance Theory*, edited by Villy Rouchota, 327-361. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1998. 330.
- ⁹ Janet Holmes. "Doing Collegiality and Keeping Control at Work: Small Talk in Government Departments." In *Small Talk*, edited by Justine Coupland, 32-61. Harlow, England: Longman, 2000.
- ¹⁰ R. I. M. Dunbar. *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996. 123.
- ¹¹ "World Languages Unpacked Content for Modern Language Programs – High School Credit Courses Levels I-VIII." North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Instructional Support Tools For Achieving New Standards. Accessed September 21, 2015.
- ¹² "ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners: Interpersonal." American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. 2015. Accessed September 20, 2015.
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- ¹⁴ Ibid.
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- ¹⁶ Mara Cobe. "Welcome and Program Introduction." Lecture, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools 6-12 World Languages Curriculum Day, Butler High School, Charlotte, August 18, 2015.
- ¹⁷ "World Languages Unpacked Content for Modern Language Programs – High School Credit Courses Levels I-VIII."
- ¹⁸ Burling, *The Talking Ape: How Language Evolved*. 181.
- ¹⁹ Burling, *The Talking Ape: How Language Evolved*. 183-184.
- ²⁰ R. I. M. Dunbar, Anna Marriott, and N. D. C. Duncan. "Human Conversational Behavior." *Human Nature*, 1997, 231-46.
- ²¹ Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. 123.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. 21, 35.
- ²⁴ Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. 38
- ²⁵ Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. 111-113.
- ²⁶ Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. 55-79
- ²⁷ Ibid.

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- ²⁸ Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. 62-69.
- ²⁹ David Dobbs. "Gossip, Grooming, and Your Dunbar Number." *Wired.com*. June 5, 2011. Accessed November 26, 2015.
- ³⁰ "Eggbeater tattoo—Google Search."
- ³¹ Roland Anderson. "Octopus Panhandlers - A TCP Exclusive." *Octopus Panhandlers*. Accessed November 22, 2015.
- ³² Jean-Louis Dessalles. *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 268.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 269.
- ³⁵ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 280.
- ³⁶ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 283.
- ³⁷ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 294-295.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 295-299.
- ⁴⁰ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 290-293.
- ⁴¹ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 315.
- ⁴² Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 317.
- ⁴³ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 323.
- ⁴⁴ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 331-332.
- ⁴⁵ Dessalles, *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. 337.
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- ⁴⁷ World Languages Unpacked Content. 13.
- ⁴⁸ Guy Deutscher. *The Unfolding of Language: An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005. 144-170.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 73-114.
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