

# AAUSC Issues in Language Program Direction

## From Thought to Action: Exploring Beliefs and Outcomes in the Foreign Language Program

---

H. Jay Siskin  
Editor

**THOMSON**  
—★—™  
**HEINLE**

Australia • Brazil • Canada • Mexico • Singapore • Spain  
United Kingdom • United States



**AAUSC 2007: From Thought to Action:  
Exploring Beliefs and Outcomes in the Foreign Language Program**  
H. Jay Siskin, Editor

**Executive Editor:** Lara Ramsey Semones  
**Assistant Editor:** Catharine Thomson  
**Associate Technology Project Manager:**  
Morgen Murphy  
**Associate Content Project Manager:**  
Jessica Rasile  
**Senior Marketing Manager:**  
Lindsey Richardson

**Senior Marketing Communications  
Manager:** Stacey Purviance  
**Marketing Assistant:** Denise Bousquet  
**Manufacturing Manager:** Marcia Locke  
**Print Buyer:** Susan Carroll  
**Compositor:** GEX Publishing Services  
**Project Manager:** GEX Publishing Services

© 2008 Thomson Heinle, a part of The Thomson Corporation. Thomson, the Star logo, and Heinle are trademarks used herein under license.

Printed in the United States of America  
1 2 3 — 09 08 07

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, web distribution or information storage and retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For more information about our products, contact us at:  
**Thomson Learning Academic  
Resource Center**  
**1-800-423-0563**

For permission to use material from this text or product, submit a request online at  
**<http://www.thomsonrights.com>**  
Any additional questions about permissions can be submitted by email to  
**[thomsonrights@thomson.com](mailto:thomsonrights@thomson.com)**

**Thomson Higher Education**  
**25 Thomson Place**  
**Boston, MA 02210-1202**  
USA

**ISBN-13:** 978-1-4282-3011-8  
**ISBN-10:** 1-4282-3011-4

Library of Congress Control Number:  
2007936134

## Chapter 8

# Persistence in Foreign Language Study: An Investigation of Learners' Beliefs

Claudia Fernández, DePaul University

### Introduction and Background

According to the 2002 survey conducted by the Modern Language Association (MLA) (Welles, 2004), enrollments in foreign language (FL) departments for 15 of the most commonly taught languages have been stable or growing. However, a challenge that FL departments still face is that of student retention beyond the basic or required levels. Goldberg, Lusin, and Welles (2004) reported that for the fall of 1999, the ratio of introductory<sup>1</sup> to advanced levels at the undergraduate level was between 2.1 and 4.3 introductory students per advanced student of Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, and Italian. In Spanish, for example, the ratio was 3.1, which means that for approximately every three students at the introductory level, only one student was at the advanced level. Regarding students in introductory courses that major in the FL, these authors reported that the ratio is even higher: One student major out of approximately 6 students of introductory French and German, one major out of 8 students of introductory Spanish, and one major out of 14 students of introductory Italian. Although the ratio is smaller for Russian, Chinese, and Japanese, these numbers clearly show a decline in the number of students from the beginning to the intermediate courses and then again from the intermediate to the advanced courses.

The factors that contribute to students' decision whether to continue or abandon FL study are numerous and broad. The increasing difficulty and time demands in higher levels of FL may be one of the reasons students do not enroll in these classes (Tse, 2000). Intrinsic rather than instrumental interest in the language and culture also seems to be a decisive factor for student retention. Ramage (1990) found that continuing students were characterized as having an intrinsic interest in the FL and culture whereas noncontinuing students placed greater importance in fulfilling the language requirement. Shedivy (2004) found that students who continue language learning not only see a practical value in FL learning but also have a desire to blend in with the people and to be immersed in the culture. In a survey conducted by Franklin, Esparza Hodge, & Flynn Sasscer (1997), faculty in a community college perceived several factors as contributing to students discontinuing FL study. In addition to nonacademic factors such as inappropriate time management, health, employment, and financial concerns, faculty also mentioned affective elements such as anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy beliefs about success in language learning.

During the last two decades, many researchers have recognized learners' beliefs as important affective characteristics that can promote or prevent successful language learning and thus have to be taken into consideration when explaining learning outcomes. Learners' beliefs about language and language learning affect performance in FL tasks; determine learners' attitudes, motivations, and behaviors; explain persistence in FL study, and lead to the selection of the goal or task to pursue (Dörnyei, 2001; Horwitz, 1988; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Riley, 1996; Mori, 1999; Yang, 1999). Benson and Lor (1999) explain that if language teachers want to influence learners' attitudes and behaviors, they need to address the beliefs on which those attitudes and behaviors are based. Dörnyei (2001) claimed that creating realistic beliefs about language learning is an important motivational strategy and that incorrect beliefs can be real barriers to mastering the second language (L2).

Fortunately for learners and instructors alike, beliefs (different from enduring individual learner traits) can be changed by rational explanation (Dörnyei, 2005; Victori & Lockhart, 1995); thus, language instructors have the possibility of positively affecting learners' language experience if realistic beliefs are introduced and monitored in the FL class.

Although a number of studies have explored learners' beliefs at the college level (Diab, 2006; Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Yang, 1999) and some have addressed motivation and perseverance in language learning (Ramage, 1990; Shedivy, 2004), no study has examined language learning beliefs in particular as a factor that may contribute to persistence in FL learning at the beginning college level. Due to the high attrition beyond the introductory levels, it is of crucial importance to explore what students think about language and language learning at the end of their required first year of FL studying so language program directors (LPDs) and instructors can positively affect student retention. The purpose of this investigation is to explore what these beliefs are and whether continuing students hold different beliefs from noncontinuing students. If these two populations hold different beliefs, this investigation will contribute to understanding some of the reasons for student attrition and thus highlight the importance of promoting beliefs that lead to persistence in FL learning.

## Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study are as follows:

1. What are beginning FL learners' beliefs about language and language learning after one year of FL study?
2. Are the beliefs of continuing students different from the beliefs of noncontinuing students?

## Methodology

*Participants.* Three hundred and twenty-four students from seven different foreign languages participated in the study. The languages were Arabic (n=13),

Chinese (n=17), French (n=51), German (n=16), Italian (n=74), Japanese (n= 17), and Spanish (n=136). All of the participants attended a Midwestern private university and were completing their first year of FL study, which is the minimum required by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. By the end of the academic year, the participants would have taken approximately 150 hours of language study.<sup>2</sup> Participants in this study make up 72.3% of the total population of first-year students enrolled. There were 219 women and 105 men; ages ranged from 17 to 50 with a mean of 21 and 19 the most frequent ages.

## Instruments

*Learners' beliefs questionnaire.* Participants' beliefs were assessed using a modified version of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1988). The original questionnaire consists of 34 items divided into five areas: (1) the difficulty of language learning, (2) foreign language aptitude, (3) the nature of language learning, (4) learning and communication strategies, and (5) motivation and expectations. The questionnaire assesses learners' beliefs using a 5-point Likert scale, with the exception of several items that use other numerical ranking scales. For the present study, the BALLI was modified to some extent. The researcher added six items, omitted two, modified three, and used a 6-point Likert scale instead. Appendix A presents these modifications. New items were added to include current views of the instructed second language acquisition (SLA) literature regarding the nature of L2 learning and learning strategies, and two items were omitted because they do not reflect current practices at the Modern Languages Department where the study took place. Three items were modified because it was practical to have all items in one type of scale or because it was thought that the items were ambiguous. The modification to the Likert scale was made to avoid respondents overusing the all-too-comfortable "neither agree nor disagree" response and thus requiring students to make a real choice in their answers. The final version of the questionnaire has 38 items.

*Students' characteristics questionnaire.* Participants also responded to a student characteristic survey that was adapted from Mori (1996). It consisted of a total of 17 open and closed questions. The questionnaire surveyed whether participants intended to continue studying their FL and, if so, when they would do so (i.e., (a) next quarter; (b) some time during my major; (c) after I graduate; (d) sometime in a distant future; (e) other). Additional students' characteristics were surveyed for future analyses (see Appendix B for the complete questionnaire). Both the BALLI and the students' characteristics questionnaires were anonymous.

## Procedure

Most of the learners who agreed to participate responded to both the BALLI and the student characteristic questionnaire in their classrooms, either at the beginning or toward the end of the FL class. The researcher administered the questionnaire to all classes except for one in Spanish, French, and German. In addition, none of the Japanese classes received the questionnaire. The omissions were

because of a conflict of schedule or because there was not enough class time to conduct the survey. In the Spanish and French classes, the instructors administered the questionnaires but were not present while the students responded. In the German and Japanese classes, the students took the questionnaires, answered them at home, and returned them to the researcher's office. The questionnaires were administered at the end of the spring quarter 2006 during either the 9th or 10th week of classes.

### Results<sup>3</sup>

Participants were divided into three groups based on their intention to continue or not to continue their studies. Group 0 consisted of those participants who reported not having the intention to continue language learning (n= 69); Group 1 was comprised of those who reported their intention to continue studying the language the following quarter (n=170); and Group 2 consisted of those who intended to continue "sometime during my major," "after I graduate," "sometime in the distant future," or "other." For practical purposes, these students were grouped together as a whole and henceforth will be designated as having the intention "to continue some time in the future" (n=73). Six participants responded that they were not sure whether they would continue; but due to the small sample size, it was decided not to include them in the analyses. In addition, six participants left the question blank. Therefore, 312 participants total made up the final pool. Table 1 shows the percentage of participants divided by groups and by language.

**Table 1**  
Participants' intention to continue studying the FL (percentage\*)

<b>Groups**</b>			
<b>Language</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Arabic	8	77	15
Chinese	18	65	18
French	18	65	16
German	31	38	31
Italian	21	56	22
Japanese	29	35	29
Spanish	24	49	26

\* Rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding or missing responses.

\*\*0: will not continue; 1: will continue next quarter; 2: will continue some time in the future.

### Beliefs about Language and Language Learning

The following sections report the results by survey area and group. Table 2 shows the responses to the BALLI according to area and group.

**Table 2**

Response frequency (in percentage) by group for the BALLI items that constitute each theme

Item	Item description	Group*	1**	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Area: FL aptitude</b>								
1.	It is easier for children than for adults to learn a foreign language.	0	51***	33	7	6	3	0
		1	54	33	9	2	1	1
		2	45	29	19	4	1	1
2.	Some people are born with a special ability that helps them learn a foreign language.	0	9	20	36	29	1	4
		1	9	30	34	14	8	6
		2	7	15	36	21	15	7
10.	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	0	17	29	38	9	7	0
		1	19	35	34	7	2	2
		2	7	45	32	14	0	3
16.	I have a foreign language aptitude.	0	4	7	41	28	12	9
		1	14	23	44	13	6	1
		2	11	26	34	14	11	4
23.	The ability to learn a foreign language depends on whether you are a man or a woman.	0	0	0	4	6	22	68
		1	2	0	1	7	15	75
		2	0	1	3	10	16	70
31.	People who are good a math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.	0	1	7	6	36	16	33
		1	1	3	11	23	31	32
		2	1	0	4	15	36	44
35.	People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	0	13	32	29	15	9	3
		1	17	29	40	11	2	1
		2	14	30	40	13	1	3
36.	Americans are good at learning foreign languages.1	0	2	2	27	33	28	9
		1	3	23	43	23	8	
		2	3	3	22	39	28	6
38.	Everybody can learn to speak another language.	0	28	33	17	18	1	1
		1	46	28	15	7	2	
		2	64	22	14	0	0	0
<b>Area: The difficulty of language learning</b>								
3.	Some languages are easier to learn than others.	0	33	33	26	6	1	0
		1	30	39	23	3	4	1
		2	21	44	23	7	4	1
4.	The language I am trying to learn is very difficult.	0	10	22	39	13	15	1
		1	6	15	33	32	11	4
		2	7	11	43	32	7	1
6.	I believe I will ultimately learn to speak this language well.	0	3	6	23	28	28	13
		1	28	41	20	7	4	1
		2	14	36	30	14	3	4

**Table 2** (continued)

Response frequency (in percentage) by group for the BALLI items that constitute each theme

Item	Item description	Group*	1**	2	3	4	5	6
14.	You can learn a language to become fluent with 1 hour a day of instruction over 2 years.	0	6	9	29	28	17	12
		1	6	15	26	28	18	8
		2	12	18	32	21	12	6
25.	It is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language.	0	3	12	15	19	25	28
		1	1	11	13	26	28	20
		2	3	8	21	16	34	18
30.	It is easier to read and write the language I am currently learning than to speak and understand it.	0	29	15	25	10	17	4
		1	22	23	24	14	13	5
		2	19	28	18	14	17	4
<b>Area: Learning and communication strategies</b>								
7.	It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.	0	4	26	36	20	10	3
		1	26	29	27	12	4	2
		2	22	33	30	11	1	3
9.	You should not say anything in the foreign language until you say it correctly.	0	1	3	15	28	38	16
		1	2	2	10	26	31	28
		2	0	1	11	30	29	29
12.	If I heard someone speaking the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to him or her so I could practicespeaking the language.	0	1	12	20	17	36	13
		1	5	12	37	24	15	7
		2	7	14	30	25	16	8
13.	It is okay to guess if you do not know a word in the foreign language.	0	4	19	31	21	18	7
		1	15	24	36	14	11	2
		2	16	19	30	18	12	4
15.	It is important to memorize vocabulary.	0	32	41	23	3	0	1
		1	40	42	14	4	1	0
		2	43	32	19	6	1	0
18.	Repeating words or sentences without knowing their meaning is a waste of time.	0	15	26	28	16	15	1
		1	19	17	21	23	16	4
		2	11	29	16	15	23	6
19.	I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people.	0	25	25	23	17	7	3
		1	14	23	34	14	12	3
		2	21	14	32	14	14	7
20.	If you are allowed to make mistakes at the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later on.	0	13	17	22	29	10	9
		1	11	17	25	20	15	12
		2	11	14	25	23	21	7



**Table 2** (continued)

Response frequency (in percentage) by group for the BALLI items that constitute each theme

Item	Item description	Group*	1**	2	3	4	5	6
22.	Activities that allow communicating with other students in the foreign language are helpful for learning.	0	23	42	23	4	6	1
		1	37	42	18	2	1	0
		2	41	37	16	4	0	1
29.	It is important to be able to explain the grammar rules of the foreign language.	0	20	32	33	10	3	1
		1	21	37	29	7	6	0
		2	30	32	27	10	1	0
<b>Area: The nature of foreign language learning</b>								
8.	It is necessary to know the foreign language culture in order to speak the foreign language.	0	6	20	45	19	6	4
		1	17	38	28	11	5	1
		2	19	26	43	6	7	0
11.	It is better to learn the foreign language in the foreign country.	0	29	33	30	4	3	0
		1	42	31	19	5	2	1
		2	51	18	21	7	3	1
17.	Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.	0	0	15	38	19	22	7
		1	8	12	32	23	21	4
		2	6	14	41	19	14	7
21.	Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules.	0	6	35	39	10	10	0
		1	9	19	39	21	11	1
		2	7	26	44	15	4	3
26.	Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects.	0	45	32	16	4	3	0
		1	41	36	18	2	2	0
		2	27	48	15	3	7	0
27.	Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating from English.	0	4	9	32	19	29	7
		1	0	7	15	29	30	19
		2	0	4	16	36	25	19
32.	Learning a foreign language is a matter of being exposed to that language.	0	36	38	20	4	1	0
		1	47	35	15	1	1	1
		2	48	30	19	1	1	0
37.	Learning a foreign language is a matter of interacting with people in that language.	0	25	36	30	9	0	0
		1	31	46	22	1	1	0
		2	38	34	26	1	0	0
<b>Area: Motivations and expectations</b>								
24.	If I speak this language well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	0	20	20	25	20	10	4
		1	41	30	19	6	4	1
		2	34	32	21	7	0	4

**Table 2** (continued)

Response frequency (in percentage) by group for the BALLI items that constitute each theme

Item	Item description	Group*	1**	2	3	4	5	6
28.	If I speak this language well, it will help me get a good job.	0	15	16	30	22	12	6
		1	24	25	34	11	7	1
		2	24	28	31	8	7	3
32.	Americans think it is important to speak a foreign language.	0	3	19	31	13	24	10
		1	5	14	19	23	22	17
		2	8	21	26	12	21	12
33.	I would like to learn this language so I can get to know its speakers better.	0	13	22	44	7	9	6
		1	24	31	31	10	3	1
		2	34	31	25	8	3	1

\*0 = will not continue; 1 = will continue next quarter; 2 = will continue some time in the future

\*\* 1: Strongly agree; 2: Mostly agree; 3: Somewhat agree; 4: Somewhat disagree; 5: Mostly disagree; 6: Strongly disagree

\*\*\*The percentage has been rounded to the nearest whole number.

*Beliefs about FL aptitude.* Most of the students across groups responded similarly on the majority of items in this area of the survey. Students agreed<sup>4</sup> or somewhat agreed that (1) it is easier for children than for adults to learn a FL (more than 90%) and (2) it is easier for someone who already speaks a FL to learn another one (approximately 85%). Most of the students disagreed or tended to disagree that (1) the ability to learn a language depends on whether you are a man or a woman (more than 95%), (2) people who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages (more than 86%), and (3) Americans are not good at learning foreign languages (approximately 73%). On four items, students showed larger differences based on their group. On item 2 (Some people are born with a special ability that helps them learn a foreign language), 73% of participants in Group 1 agreed or somewhat agreed, whereas only 65% of those in Group 0 and 58% of those in Group 2 agreed or somewhat agreed. On item 16 (I have a foreign language aptitude), only 52% of students in Group 0 agreed or somewhat agreed compared with 71% of students in Group 2 and 81% of students in Group 1. Item 35 (People who speak more than one language are very intelligent) showed larger differences among groups as well. Whereas more than 83% of students in Groups 1 and 2 agreed or somewhat agreed, only 74% of the students in Group 0 agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement. It may be that some students in this group perceive themselves as intelligent, independent of their perceived aptitude to learn a FL. On item 38 (Everybody can learn a foreign language), a striking 100% of students in Group 2 agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement

compared with almost 90% of students in Group 1 and only 78% of students in Group 0.

*Beliefs about the difficulty of language learning.* Most of the students, regardless of group, responded similarly on half the items in this area of the survey. Around 90% of the students agreed or somewhat agreed that some languages are easier to learn than others. Approximately 70% of students think it is easier to read and write in the FL than it is to speak and understand it, and about 70% disagreed or somewhat disagreed that it is easier to speak than to understand the FL. Therefore, irrespective of the intention to continue or discontinue FL studying, students tended to agree on the difficulty or easiness of the four language skills and the difference between languages in terms of their difficulty to learn them. However, 71% of students in Group 0 agreed or somewhat agreed that the language they are learning is difficult, compared with 61% of students in Group 2 and only 54% of students in Group 1. These numbers may explain students' perceived success; on item 6 (I believe I will ultimately learn to speak this language well), only 32% of students in Group 0 agreed or somewhat agreed, compared with 80% of students in Group 2 and 89% of students in Group 1. Regarding how much instruction it will take to be fluent in the L2, Group 2 seems to be the most optimistic: 62% of students agreed or somewhat agreed that with one hour a day over two years of instruction, a person can become fluent, whereas 56% and 53% of the students in Groups 0 and 1, respectively, disagreed or somewhat disagreed.

*Beliefs about learning and communication strategies.* Regardless of their groups, students shared beliefs in this area. More than 81% of students disagreed or somewhat disagreed with item 9 (You should not say anything in the foreign language until you say it correctly); in contrast, about half the participants across groups agreed or somewhat agreed that it will be hard to get rid of mistakes if you are allowed to make them at the beginning. More than 93% of students agreed or somewhat agreed that memorizing vocabulary is important, and about 87% of the students believed that it is important to be able to explain the grammar rules of the FL. In addition, about 70% of the students reported feeling self-conscious speaking in the FL in front of other people, which, being beginning FL students, is understandable. However, feeling self-conscious will not stop some students from trying. A little more than half the students in Groups 1 and 2 agreed or somewhat agreed that they would go up and speak in the FL to someone who speaks it, whereas only 33% of those in Group 0 agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement. Larger differences among groups were also found on item 13 (It is okay to guess if you do not know a word in the foreign language) where 75% of students in Group 1 agreed or somewhat agreed compared with 65% of students in Group 2 and only 54% of students in Group 0. However, while many students in Group 0 do not see the effectiveness of this strategy, they do realize that repeating words without knowing their meaning is a waste of time since 69% of the students in this group agreed or somewhat agreed compared with 57% of students in Group 1 and 45% of students in Group 2. A great majority of the students agreed or somewhat agreed that communicative activities are helpful for learning. However, whereas about 95% of students in Groups 1 and 2 agreed or somewhat agreed, 88% of students in Group 1 agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement.

*Beliefs about the nature of FL learning.* A great majority of the students, regardless of group, responded similarly to a number of items in this area. Ninety percent or more of students agreed or somewhat agreed that (1) it is better to learn the FL in the foreign country, (2) learning a FL is different from learning other school subjects, (3) learning a FL is a matter of being exposed to that language, and (4) learning a FL is a matter of interacting with people in that language. Students also tended to agree or somewhat agreed that learning a FL is a matter of learning a lot of vocabulary, although the percentages were much lower (between 53% and 61%). These percentages are also significantly low compared to that of item 21 (Learning a foreign language is a mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules) with which many more students (67%–80%) agreed or somewhat agreed. Larger differences among groups were found on items 8 and 27. Whereas the majority of students agreed or somewhat agreed that it is necessary to know the culture of the language in order to speak the FL, between 83% and 88% of students in Groups 1 and 2, respectively, agreed or somewhat agreed, compared to 71% of students in Group 0. Also, around 80% of students in Groups 1 and 2 disagreed or somewhat disagreed that learning a FL is a matter of translating from English, but only 55% of students in Group 0 disagreed or somewhat disagreed.

*Motivations and expectations.* This was the area of the survey in which larger differences among groups were found for all items. Between 87% and 90% of students in Groups 1 and 2 agreed or somewhat agreed that they will have many opportunities to use the language, whereas only 65% of students in Group 0 agreed or somewhat agreed. Similar percentages were found for item 28 (“If I speak this language well, it will help me get good job”). About 54% of students in Groups 0 and 2 agreed or somewhat agreed that Americans think it is important to speak a FL, whereas only 38% of students in Group 1 agreed or somewhat agreed. Many students, irrespective of group, agreed or somewhat agreed that they would like to speak the FL so they can get to know its speakers better; however, Group 0 had the smallest percentage (79%) compared to Group 1 (86%) and Group 2 (90%).

### **Relationship Between Beliefs and Intention to Continue FL Study**

A multivariate analysis (MANOVA) was performed to find whether there was a significant relationship between group responses and the five areas of the BALLI. This was indeed the case. The test revealed differences between (1) language aptitude and group, Wilks' Lambda = .811,  $F(18, 578) = 3.543, p = .000$ ; (2) difficulty of language learning and group, Wilks' Lambda = .663,  $F(12, 600) = 11.393, p = .000$ ; (3) learning and communication strategies and group, Wilks' Lambda = .846,  $F(20, 594) = 2.586, p = .000$ ; (4) the nature of L2 learning and group, Wilks' Lambda = .874,  $F(16, 596) = 2.605, p = .001$ ; and (5) motivation and expectations and group, Wilks' Lambda = .862,  $F(8, 604) = 5.839, p = .000$ .

Tukey post hoc tests were performed to find the groups that were significantly different. Table 3 shows the survey items whose means were statistically different across groups. Group 0 was different from only Group 1 on item 13 and from only Group 2 on items 14 and 31. Groups 1 and 2 were different from each other only on items 2, 31, and 6. On most of the items (i.e., 16, 38, 6, 7, 12, 22, 8, 27, 37, 24, 28, and 34), Groups 1 and 2 were different from Group 0 but were not different

from each other. These results give evidence that continuing and noncontinuing students hold different beliefs in several areas of FL learning.

**Table 3**  
Survey items whose responses were significantly different\* among groups

Item	Item description	Group	Mean
2.	Some people are born with a special ability that helps them learn a foreign language.	0	3.10
		1	3.02
		2	3.46
16.	I have a foreign language aptitude.	0	3.64
		1	2.75
		2	3.04
31.	People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.	0	4.58
		1	4.72
		2	5.13
38.	Everybody can learn to speak another language.	0	2.36
		1	1.98
		2	1.49
6.	I believe I will ultimately learn to speak this language well.	0	4.10
		1	2.19
		2	2.65
14.	You can learn a language to become fluent with 1 hour a day of instruction over 2 years.	0	3.77
		1	3.61
		2	3.22
7.	It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.	0	3.13
		1	2.45
		2	2.60
12.	If I heard someone speaking the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to him or her so I could practice speaking the language.	0	4.12
		1	3.53
		2	3.55
13.	It is okay to guess if you do not know a word in the foreign language.	0	3.50
		1	2.86
		2	3.03
22.	Activities that allow communicating with other students in the foreign language are helpful for learning.	0	2.32
		1	1.88
		2	1.89
8.	It is necessary to know the foreign language culture in order to speak the foreign language.	0	3.12
		1	2.50
		2	2.57
27.	Learning a FL is mostly a matter of translating from English.	0	3.81
		1	4.38
		2	4.36

**Table 3** (continued)

Survey items whose responses were significantly different\* among groups

Item	Item description		
37.	Learning a foreign language is a matter of interacting with people in that language.	0	2.23
		1	1.94
		2	1.89
24.	If I speak this language well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	0	2.93
		1	2.05
		2	2.17
28.	If I speak this language well, it will help me get a good job.	0	3.21
		1	2.54
		2	2.56
33.	I would like to learn this language so I can get to know its speakers better.	0	2.97
		1	2.38
		2	2.11

\* $p < .05$ 

Regarding FL aptitude, students in Groups 1 and 2 believe that they have FL aptitude, whereas students in Group 0 tended to disagree with the statement. Also, Groups 1 and 2 believe more strongly than Group 0 that everybody can learn to speak another language.

These results correspond with the degree of confidence that the respondents expressed in their ability to learn the FL well (item 6): Most of the students in Group 0 disagreed or somewhat disagreed, whereas most of the continuing students agreed or somewhat agreed (although Group 1 was more confident than Group 2). Group 2 was more confident than Group 0 regarding the time it takes to learn a FL (item 14), although the former tended to agree more strongly than the latter that one hour a day over two years of instruction is enough.

Regarding learning and communication strategies, all groups tended to agree that it is important to speak with an excellent accent; but Groups 1 and 2 believed this statement more strongly than Group 0. A similar situation occurred for item 22. Whereas Group 0 believed that communicative activities are helpful for learning, Groups 1 and 2 agreed more strongly with this statement. Likewise, Groups 1 and 2 seemed to be more confident conversing in the FL than students in Group 0. Although Group 0 tended to agree that guessing a word is okay, Group 1 believed more strongly in this statement.

Noncontinuing students hold different beliefs than continuing students regarding the nature of language learning. Whereas Group 0 tended to disagree that learning a FL is a matter of translating from English, many more students in Groups 1 and 2 showed stronger disagreement. Both continuing and noncontinuing learners tended to agree that it is necessary to know the FL culture to speak the FL; however, Groups 1 and 2 believed more strongly in this statement. The same situation occurred with the

importance of interaction in the FL (item 37). Both Group 1 and Group 2 agreed more strongly with this statement than did Group 0.

Regarding motivations and expectations, Groups 1 and 2 hold stronger beliefs than Group 0 in their expectations that they will have many opportunities to use the FL, that the FL will help them find a better job, and that they would like to learn the FL to know its speakers better.

## Discussion

A little more than half the students reported having the intention to continue FL learning the following quarter, and more than 20% of the students reported having the intention to continue language learning sometime in the future. Further investigation is needed to examine the reasons why some students chose to continue FL learning in the short term and why others chose to leave it for the future. Nonetheless, the fact that most of the beginning students intend to continue the following quarter or some time in the future is heartening.

Nonetheless, more than 20% of the students across languages do not intend to continue language learning. Indeed, these students hold beliefs that are different from the beliefs of those students who intend to continue language learning. Likewise, the beliefs reported by noncontinuing students are not the most appropriate for learning a FL.

Many noncontinuing learners reported a perceived lack of aptitude for FL learning, which differentiates them from those who have the intention to continue. It is likely that the previous language experience of many of the noncontinuing students led them to believe that they lack this aptitude, due perhaps to low grades or poor classroom performance. Because aptitude is one of the factors with which students mostly associate their failure or success (Graham, 1994), it is not surprising that those who perceive themselves as not having the ability to learn a FL decide to end their studies, while those who perceive themselves as having high ability decide to continue. This creates a real concern: For students to continue an activity, they need to attribute their failures not to a lack of ability, but to a lack of something that can be controlled and changed; for example, effort and persistence (Dörnyei, 2001; Ushioda, 2001). Therefore, if students are not continuing language learning due to a perceived lack of ability, they are quitting for the wrong reasons.

Noncontinuing students were different from the other two groups in terms of their knowledge about the nature of FL learning and learning strategies. Whereas not all of the beliefs of participants across groups were correct or realistic regarding current SLA literature (see the following discussion), those who do not intend to continue were characterized as being less knowledgeable or less confident in their beliefs in these areas than the participants in the other two groups. On the one hand, the great majority of continuing students (both Group 1 and Group 2) disagree that learning a FL is mostly a matter of translating from English, compared with only half the students in Group 0 who disagree or somewhat disagree with the statement. This is most striking when contrasted with the views of nearly

one-third of the participants in Group 0 who somewhat agree with it. In addition, many more continuing students agree that it is okay to guess if you do not know a word, whereas almost 50% of the students in Group 0 disagree or somewhat disagree with this statement. These results reveal that many of the students who decide not to continue are misinformed about learning strategies, which might be hindering their learning outcomes. Therefore, these students abandon language learning because they perceive a lack of ability, when it may very well be that their learning strategies are inappropriate.

On the other hand, there were some instances in which many of these learners held correct beliefs, but they did not agree with them as strongly as the other two groups. For example, most of the students in Groups 1 and 2 strongly or mostly agree that communicative activities are helpful for learning and that learning a FL is mostly a matter of interaction in the language, two facts widely supported by SLA research. On the other hand, students in Group 0 did not agree as strongly as Groups 1 and 2 did. Also, while most of the participants in Groups 1 and 2 strongly or mostly agree on the importance of learning the FL culture—again, a factor widely supported in the FL teaching literature—many participants in Group 0 *somewhat* agree. Therefore, many of the noncontinuing students are correct regarding some beliefs, but it seems that they are not as confident in those beliefs as the other two groups are. Because correct beliefs about the nature of FL learning play a major role in selecting learning strategies (Mori, 1999; 2007; Yang, 1999), not having the correct beliefs contributes to poor learning outcomes that may cause students to abandon the task.

Many noncontinuing students do not think they would have opportunities to use the FL and do not see any instrumental value in learning the FL, in contrast with continuing students. The perceived practical benefit that learning a FL may bring about is one of the strongest motivational factors in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). If students do not see the link between something they value (e.g., getting a good job and being fluent in a FL), the chances that they will continue language learning may be very slim unless other motivational factors are involved (Ramage, 1990). As can be seen, those who see a strong practical value in learning a FL are continuing, whereas those who don't are quitting. However, almost 80% of the noncontinuing students agree or somewhat agree that they would like to learn the FL so they can get to know its speakers better. This might indicate that most of these learners tend to place an integrative value on FL learning (Gardner, 2001)—or in other words, that they have some interest in social interaction with members of the FL community. This finding is particularly important because research has found that both instrumental and integrative motives play a significant role in mastering a FL; however, those with an integrative motivation go further in language learning (Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991). Therefore, noncontinuing students have this interest in their favor as a source for potentially succeeding in language learning; unfortunately, they hold other set beliefs that hinder such potential.

Both continuing and noncontinuing students believe FL learning involves ability and intelligence; but unlike noncontinuing students, continuing students



also believe that they have the ability. When these students have had a successful language experience and attribute such success to their ability, we have the ideal motivational scenario (Ushioda, 1996). In addition, the majority of continuing and noncontinuing students give importance to learning the grammar rules and memorizing vocabulary; however, continuing students believe more strongly that acquiring an excellent accent is important. Regardless of how realistic such a belief might be, it may be linked to effort nevertheless, which is also an appropriate belief when pursuing an activity.

Most of the continuing students also showed that they had more knowledge about the nature of language learning and about learning strategies compared with noncontinuing students, and many of them strongly believed in the strategies. Also, many of these students saw both practical and integrative motives to study the FL, and they believed more strongly than noncontinuing students in their ultimate success. In sum, the students who want to continue language learning seem to hold the appropriate beliefs, which has been shown to be one of the factors that distinguishes them from the students who do not intend to continue.

Most of the differences observed among groups were between noncontinuing students and continuing students (both Group 1 and Group 2). It would appear that there are only a few differences regarding beliefs between those who intend to continue studying immediately and those who intend to postpone study. For example, Group 2 disagreed more strongly than Group 1 regarding an innate ability for FL learning. They also believed, like the rest of the groups, that people who speak more than one language are very intelligent. It seems, therefore, that although Group 1 agreed that some ability and intelligence are involved in language learning, it also believed that average ability is enough and, thus, that almost everyone is able to learn a FL.

In addition, Group 2 was different from Group 1 in its expectation of success, and it was different from Group 0 in the amount of time required to learn a FL. While most of the participants in Group 1 believed that they will ultimately learn the language well, only half the participants in Group 2 believed this. This may indicate that although they intend to continue language learning in the future, they see less opportunity to succeed because they are not continuing right away. In addition, this group was very optimistic regarding the time of instruction that would be needed to become fluent. It is of concern that more than 60% of the participants in Group 2 agree or somewhat agree that a person can become fluent with 1 hour a day of instruction over 2 years. Perhaps this belief causes them to think that because they already have one year of study, it will be easy to continue in the future since it will take them only one more year of study to become fluent.

Although it is good news that most of the students held beliefs about the importance of FL exposure, meaning, and interaction in FL learning, it is also a cause of concern that many students in Groups 1 and 2 believed in the importance of having an excellent accent. It is well known that acquiring a native accent is one of the most difficult aspects of FL learning—so difficult that most otherwise competent FL speakers are betrayed as nonnative precisely because of their foreign

accent. While linking effort to achieving high levels of language learning is of great importance, having unrealistic beliefs can lead to frustration and disappointment.

Finally, this study did not investigate the reasons students will continue FL studies some time in the future and not in the following quarter. It is important, however, to make students aware of the large amount of time that FL learning takes. Instructors should point out that if students want to continue language learning, the best time may be during school, not later in their lives when they have a more demanding job and family commitments.

## Conclusions

The results of this study showed that continuing and noncontinuing students share similar beliefs about several aspects of FL learning. However, beginning language students hold a set of beliefs about language and language learning that have a relationship with their intention to continue or not continue language study. The investigation also showed that those who intend to continue, for the most part, hold the beliefs necessary to succeed in the task of FL learning, whereas those who do not continue hold beliefs that hinder their success.

Because students' beliefs contribute to learners' decisions to continue or to quit language study, it is of major importance to promote appropriate beliefs such as effort and persistence in the FL classroom as major factors for achievement. In addition, it is crucial to create realistic and correct beliefs about language learning not only because we want students to continue but also, perhaps more importantly, because we do not want them to quit language learning for the wrong reasons.

## Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that it did not take into account the effect that different variables (such as language of choice, major previous studies, other languages learned, or age) may have on learners' beliefs. The study considered the population as a whole, only having in common the fact that all were beginning language learners in their first year of study. Further investigation needs to assess the effect that other variables have on learners' beliefs and their intentions to continue language learning.

A second limitation is that the study did not confirm whether learners' intentions were reflected in enrollments. It is true that in the spring quarter, many students enroll for the classes they will take the following fall (so when they answered the survey, they might have been enrolled already); but it is also true that many students do not enroll until later or at the beginning of the fall quarter. It is also the case that students change their minds regarding the classes they chose to take back in the spring. Because the institution where this study was conducted does not offer intermediate FL classes in the summer, the pace of language learning is interrupted; thus, participants who thought they would continue the following quarter may end up not doing so. To have a more complete perspective of the situation, a

continuation of this study that includes the actual enrollments for the following fall quarter would be a desirable follow-up.

## Notes

1. The introductory level for this survey was defined as "beginning and intermediate courses up to the bridge or transitional course (if [one] existed)" (Goldberg, Lusin, & Welles, 2004 p. 28). Therefore, these data do not provide information about attrition that occurs between beginning and intermediate levels.
2. The students of Italian will have taken 200 hours. At this institution, the Italian program differs from the rest of the language programs in that the students take five hours of language per week. In the rest of the languages, students take four hours per week.
3. I would like to thank Nick Marotta, María Pérez, and Clara Burgo for their help in gathering the data and recording the survey results.
4. To increase readability, unless noted, *agree* will refer to both responses: *strongly agree* and *mostly agree*; *disagree* will refer to both *strongly disagree* and *mostly disagree* responses.

## References

- Benson, P., & Lor, W. (1999). Conceptions of language and language learning. *System*, 27, 459-472.
- Diab, L. (2006). University students' beliefs about learning English and French in Lebanon. *System*, 34, 80-96.
- Dörnyei, Z. (1990). Conceptualizing motivation in foreign language learning. *Language Learning*, 40, 46-78.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Hillsdale, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Franklin, L., Esparza Hodge, M., & Flynn Sasscer, M. (1997). Improving retention with strategy-based instruction. *Inquiry*, 1, 21-27.
- Gardner, R. (2001). Integrative motivation and second language acquisition. In Z. Dörnyei & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Motivation and second language learning* (pp. 1-20). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Gardner, R., & MacIntyre, P. (1991). An instrumental motivation in language study: Who says it isn't effective? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 13, 57-72.
- Goldberg, D., Lusin, N., & Welles, E. (2004). Successful college and university foreign language programs, 1995-99: Part 2. *ADFL Bulletin*, 35, 27-70.
- Graham, S. (1994). Classroom motivation from an attributional perspective. In H. F. O'Neil Jr. & M. Drillings (Eds.), *Motivation: Theory and research* (pp. 31-48). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Horwitz, E. (1988). The beliefs about language learning of beginning university foreign language students. *Modern Language Journal*, 72, 283-294.
- Kern, R. (1995). Students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 28, 71-92.
- Mantle-Bromley, C. (1995). Positive attitudes and realistic beliefs: Links to proficiency. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79, 372-386.
- Mori, Y. (1996). *Beliefs about language learning and their relationship to the ability to integrate information from multiple sources in interpreting novel kanji compounds*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

- Mori, Y. (1999). Epistemological beliefs and language learning beliefs: What do language learners believe about their learning? *Language Learning*, 49, 377-415.
- Mori, Y. (2007). Japanese language students' perceptions on *kanji* learning and their relationship to novel *kanji* word learning ability. *Language Learning*, 57, 57-85.
- Ramage, K. (1990). Motivational factors and persistence in foreign language study. *Language Learning*, 40, 189-219.
- Riley, P. (1996, November). "BATs and BALLs": Beliefs about talk and beliefs about language learning. Proceedings of the international conference AUTONOMY 2000: The development of learning independence in language learning. Bangkok, pp. 151-168.
- Shedivy, S. (2004). Factors that lead some students to continue the study of foreign language past the usual 2 years of high school. *System*, 32, 103-119.
- Tse, L. (2000). Student perception of foreign language study: A qualitative analysis of foreign language autobiographies. *The Modern Language Journal*, 84, 69-84.
- Ushioda, E. (1996). Developing a dynamic concept of motivation. In T. J. Hickey (Ed.), *Language, education and society in a changing world* (pp. 239-245). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Ushioda, E. (2001). Language learning at university: Exploring the role of motivational thinking. In Z. Dörnyei & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Motivation and second language learning* (pp. 91-124). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Victori, M., & Lockhart, W. (1995). Enhancing metacognition in self-directed language learning. *System*, 23, 223-234.
- Welles, E. (2004). Foreign language enrollments in United States institutions of higher education, fall 2002. *ADFL Bulletin*, 35, 7-26.
- Yang, N. (1999). The relationship between EFL learners' beliefs and learning strategy use. *System*, 27, 515-535.

## Appendix A

### Modifications to the BALLI

#### New Items

Area: Learning and communication strategies

15. It is important to memorize vocabulary.
18. Repeating words or sentences without knowing their meaning is a waste of time.
22. Activities that allow communicating with other students in the foreign language are helpful for learning.
29. It is important to be able to explain the grammar rules of the foreign language

Area: The nature of language learning

32. Learning a foreign language is a matter of being exposed to that language.
37. Learning a foreign language is a matter of interacting with people in that language.

#### Omitted Items:

17. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.
21. It is important to practice in the language laboratory.

**Modified Items**

Original:

- 4. The language I am trying to learn is: (1) a very difficult language, (2) a difficult language, (3) a language of medium difficulty, (4) an easy language, (5) a very easy language.

Modified:

- 4. The language I am trying to learn is very difficult.

Original:

- 14. If someone spent 1 hour a day learning a language, how long would it take him/her to become fluent? (1) less than a year, (2) 1-2 years, (3) 3-5 years, (4) 5-10 years, (6) you can't learn a language in 1 hour a day.

Modified:

- 14. You can learn a language to become fluent with 1 hour a day of instruction over 2 years.

Original:

- 22. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.

Modified:

- 23. The ability to learn a language depends on whether you are a man or a woman.

Likert scale:

Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Somewhat agree	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6
1 ----- 2	----- 3	----- 4	----- 5	----- 6	

**Appendix B**

**Students' Characteristics Questionnaire**

Student Characteristics Survey

As the last part of the questionnaire, please answer the following questions. Your responses will be strictly confidential. No one besides me will have access to your information. Depending on how each item is written, please fill in or circle the appropriate answer for each item. Thank you.

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender: Male          Female

- 3. Year: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Master PhD Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Major: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Your most recent GPA (Grade Point Average): \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Is English your native language? Yes No  
If No, what is your native language? \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Do you speak any other language other than English and the language you are studying? Yes No  
If Yes, which language(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. Have you been to a country where the foreign language you are studying is spoken?  
Yes No  
If Yes, How long ago? \_\_\_\_\_ For how much time?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What was the purpose of your visit? \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Why did you choose the foreign language you are studying instead of other foreign language?
- 10. What is your goal(s) of studying the foreign language?
- 11. Which grade do you expect from your foreign language course this quarter?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 12. How important it is to you to receive a good grade from your foreign language course?  
Don't Care Very Important  
1 -----2 -----3 -----4 -----5 -----6
- 13. Do you think what you are learning in your foreign language class is valuable to you?  
Not At All Very Valuable  
1 -----2 -----3 -----4 -----5 -----6
- 14. Do you enjoy learning a foreign language?  
Not At All Very Much  
1 -----2 -----3 -----4 -----5 -----6
- 15. Do you plan to continue studying at DePaul next year? Yes No Maybe
- 16. Do you plan to continue studying the foreign language you are studying now? Yes No  
If Yes, please select when:  
next quarter  
some time during my major  
after I graduate  
some time in the distant future  
other  
If No, please indicate why.

**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**