Development and Supervision of Teaching Assistants in Foreign Languages

Joel C. Walz
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Toward a Revised Model of TA Training

Cynthia A. Fox
State University of New York at Albany

A review of the literature on foreign language teaching assistant (TA) training over the past 30 years reveals the emergence of a widely accepted model consisting of a preservice workshop followed by an in-service methods course.[1] The ostensible goal of this model is to provide first-year TAs with classroom techniques considered the most practical for teaching elementary language courses. These courses emphasize developing communicative language skills, and as a result recommended practices tend to include activities that encourage contextualized speaking practice or Total Physical Response activities to develop listening comprehension (Asher, 1977).

Since the theoretical assumptions about language and language learning that are the presumed source of these practices are only implied, the model must make one of three suppositions about TAs: (1) that they already possess the requisite assumptions; (2) that they do not need to share or understand the assumptions behind the recommended practices in order to teach in a manner that is consistent with those assumptions; or (3) that they do not possess the assumptions but can derive them from recommended practices and from other teaching resources available to them.

My experience over the last six years while supervising some 80 TAs in French suggests that each of these suppositions is false. In the case of the first

supposition, it is clear that despite considerable proficiency in using French, TAs hold many beliefs about language in general and French in particular that are unsupportable from a linguistic point of view. Moreover, these beliefs are also frequently incompatible with theories of language that provide the theoretical bases of communicative language teaching as outlined, for example, in Canale and Swain (1980).[2]

Regarding the second supposition, my visits to TA classrooms indicate that a given theory of language influences classroom practice only to the extent that the theory corresponds to the teacher's own mental model of language. For instance, a TA who believes that French is a set of prescriptive grammar rules will devote an extraordinary amount of time to, say, past participle agreement in transitive verbs, even though most native speakers ignore those rules.

In the case of the third supposition, an examination of the resources upon which TAs routinely draw, such as their own experiences as language learners, teaching gimmicks, and, most importantly, their textbook, reveals that typically all are inadequate sources of information about both language in general and French in particular. Although all the examples given here are drawn from my personal experiences working with TAs in French, I think I can safely assume that the problems I identify are neither program- nor language-specific.

It is my thesis that effective language teaching depends on the teacher's possession of a conceptual understanding of language that is grounded in linguistic theory. However, since practical and political constraints make it unlikely that TA supervisors will be able to add required coursework in general and applied linguistics or in second language acquisition to their programs, other solutions must be found. By examining more closely the development of the current model of TA training and the resources that TAs use to organize their teaching, I will suggest a practical way in which TA training might be improved.

Two Models of TA Training

TA training in foreign languages is a relatively recent phenomenon in American universities. Less than 30 years ago an MLA/U.S. Department of Education survey of graduate schools granting Ph.D.'s in foreign languages revealed that 60% of the 51 responding departments provided absolutely no training for TAs (MacAllister, 1966). While subsequent surveys, such as one

discussed by Schulz (1980), have reported decreases in this shocking baseline figure, TA training is still by no means either universal or particularly rigorous (Devens, 1986; Elling, 1988; Weimer, Svinicki & Bauer, 1989). Indeed, it appears that at least some individual members of foreign language departments still believe that TA training is totally unnecessary. For instance, Koop (1991) reports the results of a survey of 76 professors of French culture and civilization from 63 American institutions in which 16% of the respondents did not agree that Ph.D. candidates should be required to take at least one course in the pedagogy of French, and in which 24% of respondents also opposed requiring at least one course in the pedagogy of the candidate's speciality.

With the increase in TA training programs over the last 30 years, a small body of literature has developed on what ought to be included in such programs. This literature tends to fall into two categories. The first and older category places TA training within the framework of a general preparation to enter the academy. For example, MacAllister (1966) reports the conclusions of a panel of experienced language scholars and teachers in response to the MLA/U.S. Department of Education survey cited previously. Their recommendation was that graduate schools require work not only in the principles of language teaching, but also in the principles of linguistic analysis, cultural analysis, and the presentation of literature to undergraduates. Similar concerns are expressed by Ryder (1976), Hagiwara (1976, 1977), Showalter (1984), Elling (1988), Azevedo (1990), and Murphy (1991).

The more recent trend identifies TA training almost exclusively with pedagogical issues and focuses on preparing TAs in their first year of graduate studies to teach elementary-level language courses. The model of training most often proposed involves a workshop that takes place shortly before the teaching assignment is to begin, followed by a quarter- or semester-length methods course in the first or second semester of teaching. Representative of this school are Di Donato (1983), Ervin and Muyskens (1982), Freed (1975), Knop and Herron (1982), Lee (1989), Nerenz, Herron, and Knop (1979), Rava (1987), Rogers (1987), and Schulz (1980).

Scholars in this second category have a tendency to use the TAs' own perceptions of their needs as an argument for organizing the programs described or recommended. For example, Ervin and Muyskens (1982) report on a survey in which 303 subjects from four universities were asked to rank 29 previously identified "interests and concerns regarding...teaching duties." Items given top priority by the respondents were (1) "learning practical

techniques and methods," (2) "teaching the four skills," (3) "teaching conversation/getting the students to speak," and (4) "making the class interesting." Other items were of an equally practical nature and included "motivating students" (seventh) and "gaining experience, self-confidence" (thirteenth).

Only one item on the survey, "improving my command of the target language; improving my knowledge of subject matter," mentions content, but this item seems to conflate what I consider to be two separate issues, language proficiency (command of target language) and linguistic knowledge (command of subject matter). This last concern was only ranked seventeenth, however, which is presumably what lead Ervin and Muyskens to make no recommendation that TA trainers concern themselves with what TAs do or do not know about the language they teach.

In a similar vein, Lee (1989, p. 26) describes practically oriented workshops on "Grading Written Work" and "Assessing Oral Performance," which were added to his program in "a direct response to the specific needs of the TA's teaching in our particular language program."

Weimer, Svinicki, and Bauer's (1989, p. 63) findings, which summarize attitudes and trends across departments, indicate that even when "content" is identified as a problem area, it is viewed in quantitative rather than qualitative terms:

> Basically, new college instructors need help in two areas: content and method. With respect to content, departments need to ensure consistency across different sections. Sometimes TAs need help learning content. More often, it is a matter of teaching pace and organization and ensuring uniformity of evaluative practices.

The extent to which this second, more narrow school of thought has gained acceptance can perhaps be seen in the fact that arguments for advanced methods courses, for example, Lalande (1991a), are beginning to appear in print.

It seems reasonable to suppose that at least two factors explain why an essentially streamlined model of TA training has become so widely accepted. On the one hand, the kind of comprehensive training suggested by MacAllister (1966) is impractical. Such a program would mean increasing faculty while reducing the number of courses students could take within their own discipline. At the same time, advocates of TA training are up against a system that, ironically enough, does not always assign

teaching a high priority. In fact, it is no secret that TA supervisors and language program coordinators have often been regarded as second-class citizens in foreign language departments (Dvorak, 1986; Lee & VanPatten, 1991). As Lalande (1991b) has pointed out, a current trend toward moving supervisor/coordinator positions out of the professor series and into the lecturer series is evidence that these negative attitudes persist. Thus, the narrow scope of the current model probably has to do with the difficulty of establishing and maintaining support for training programs, not with any philosophical objection to a more comprehensive approach.

Practical considerations may also help explain why methodology and not some other likely candidate, such as applied linguistics or second language acquisition, has been the focus of TA training. On the one hand, knowledge of linguistics and its subdisciplines is commonly thought to require more specialized training than does knowledge of methodology. If the emphasis of TA training is on methodology, that training does not have to be the exclusive domain of the linguist. For some departments, then, training does not require special hiring, but can be carried out by virtually any member of the department.

On the other hand, the imposition of rigid time constraints on the training process makes it crucial that trainers provide TAs with what they need to fulfill their basic mission. Under these circumstances it is natural to turn to TAs themselves for input. Since most inexperienced TAs are unaware of the usefulness of training in various linguistic fields, it is not surprising that their responses should focus on classroom practice.

In all probability, however, the reasons for the emphasis on methodology merely dovetail with other, more compelling, ones. Indeed, such emphasis seems to follow naturally from three important developments in foreign language education: (1) the increased prominence of oral proficiency as a primary goal of instruction; (2) the shift from a structural to a functional view of language; and (3) research in second language acquisition that suggests that a language is not learned through conscious analysis of rules, but is naturally assimilated through use (Krashen, 1981). While no general consensus exists that explicit teaching of language through structural analysis and practice has no place in the communicative classroom, few would now disagree that these activities should be minimized in favor of what Freed (1975, pp. 12-13) describes as "contextual, challenging and useful practice in the language." Emphasis on methodology in TA training, then, encourages TAs to learn how to provide as many contexts for natural

acquisition as possible by taking the focus off talking *about* the language and placing it on talking *in* the language.

Inadequate TA Resources

One way of arguing the case that TA trainers need to be concerned about TAs' beliefs about language is to look at what TAs must otherwise rely on to help them organize their classes and to answer student questions. My experience suggests that the information they impart to students comes from one of three sources: memories about how they themselves were taught; teaching gimmicks shared by other, often equally inexperienced TAs; and the textbook. Whether it is because they do not think they need other help, because they are unable to predict what they will need to know in front of the class, or simply because making an appeal to authority is to risk presenting themselves as incompetent, it is very rare for TAs to seek help of this sort from their supervisor.

Problems of changing perspectives on the goals and methods of language teaching, if not with memory itself, make the first source, "memories about how they themselves were taught," one of doubtful utility. For instance, TAs who learned French by explicit learning of grammar rules will naturally turn to those rules to answer student questions, often using terminology that, to the student, may be arcane. Likewise, TAs who as students were made to respond in complete sentences or to sound out passages intended for reading comprehension will call on their own students to do the same even though these activities may not be consistent with the goals of communicative language teaching. Frustration with materials that are very different from what they used when learning the language may also lead them to refer to those same materials, and consequently to fall back on outdated pedagogy.[3]

The second source, teaching gimmicks that TAs share with one another, are frequently mnemonic devices such as the acronym BAGS (Beauty, Age, Goodness, Size) — the letters of which help students remember the semantic categories of adjectives that precede nouns — or the *maison d'être* for remembering which verbs take *être* as the auxiliary. Sometimes, however, the gimmicks are intended to provide insight into the language by explaining or clarifying the conceptual difficulties that students may have with constructions like causative *faire* or the partitive determiner. These explanations involve making claims about how native

speakers interpret sentences that are ungrammatical and also tend to present speakers as conscious agents in the creation of forms that fill what would appear to be gaps in their language, particularly when it is compared with English.[4]

TAs would not be so vulnerable to these pitfalls if the third source of information upon which they draw to organize their courses, the textbook, were a reliable source of descriptive information about the language. Unfortunately, the literature suggesting that textbooks are actually contributing to the problem appears to be growing.

In a study of 22 elementary-level college French textbooks published in the United States, Walz (1986) found that while all the books include speaking as a major goal, many base their presentations of the grammar on written forms and most fail to provide clear and consistent information about oral forms that would promote proficiency in speaking. Similarly, Herschensohn (1988) studied the linguistic accuracy and clarity of presentation of the French determiner system in 11 representative college textbooks according to six linguistically based criteria and was unable to find even one that included an accurate descriptive account of the forms. Her discussion of how the partitive is presented is particularly enlightening. If, she argues, the article system is described in terms of assertion (indefinite articles) and presupposition (definite articles), and these terms are used consistently, then the partitive, a designation of "indefinite mass," should not cause undue difficulty. However, she found that only two of the textbooks classified these articles as indefinites and made the count/mass distinction, while the rest presented it as a complex syntactic and semantic structure.

Finally, Di Vito (1991) studied the distribution and productivity of French negation, object pronouns, relative clauses, and question formation in four different text types and compared her results with the treatment these structures receive in three representative college textbooks. She found, for example, that no textbook mentioned that the preverbal negative particle *ne* is characteristically absent in informal conversations of educated native speakers and may even be absent in formal speech. Conversely, all three textbooks treated the placement of two preverbal object pronouns together in a clause, although the data revealed that this syntactic configuration is virtually nonexistent across text types. Her conclusion (1991, p. 393), that "striking differences in frequency and function are typically ignored, and examples of grammatical structures can often be found which are completely unsupported by native speaker use," casts serious doubt on the usefulness of

the textbook as a guidepost in pointing TAs toward an understanding of language that is grounded in linguistic theory. Indeed, since recognizing inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the textbook requires a high level of analytic and sociolinguistic sophistication, fanciful notions about language may even be spawned and perpetuated.

The problem, however, is not just that textbooks need to be better informed about the linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic features of the language described. They also need to be better grounded in current theories of linguistics and language acquisition. Schulz (1991) cites evidence from several studies to argue convincingly that despite considerable upheaval in foreign language teaching methods in the last 20 years, little about the textbook has changed since the heyday of audiolingualism. In spite of a surface veneer of communicative-language teaching jargon, textbooks present language as a series of discrete grammatical points that are learned mainly through habit formation:

> Without question, the prefaces of textbooks read differently than those of yesteryear. They use all the right "buzzwords" such as "proficiency-oriented," "real language use," "functional–notional organization," "authentic language," "real-life contexts," "communicative focus," "communicative tasks," "personalized activities," etc. A careful examination of the actual instructional sequences reveals, however, that we have a long way to go to translate current theories of second/foreign language acquisition and communicative language learning and teaching into practice. (Schulz, 1991, p. 168.)

Among what she terms the "emerging insights, or commonly agreed upon tenets, based either on second language acquisition theory or empirical research which inform how languages might be learned" (p. 171), she cites Acculturation/Pidginization Theory, Linguistic Universal Theory, Interlanguage Theory, Discourse Theory, and Krashen's Monitor Model. It should be added that the notion of "text" is expanding quite rapidly to include video materials. If, as Cummins (1989, p. 412) says, "an important use of the AV [audiovideo] model is to show interaction between native speakers, and teachers can point out features of kinesics, such as distance between speakers or how gestures correlate with words and meaning," then textbooks must also be informed about kinesic theory and include pedagogically sound techniques for teaching students appropriate nonverbal behavior.

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Toward an Integrative Model

Much of my argument that TAs need more linguistic training is based on anecdotal evidence, and is thus suspect until it is tested by more systematic means.[5] Moreover, the question of how much beginning graduate students really know about the language they teach is only part of the problem that needs to be examined. First, it has been assumed throughout this chapter that knowledge about the language is a prerequisite for effective teaching. This truth seems intuitively obvious, but it leaves open the problem of exactly what constitutes sufficient knowledge. Second, the case has been made that TAs carry with them certain implicit assumptions about what languages are and how they are learned, and that these assumptions are not only unscientific but also incompatible with current theories of language and language acquisition and with the goals of communicative language teaching. Third, it has been argued that the current trend to do nothing systematic to develop both specific and general knowledge about language in our TAs leaves them seriously underprepared to teach despite their participation in what otherwise may be rigorous training programs. This last argument raises the question of what kinds of intervention in TA training would be most effective. It does not wholly exclude the possibility that the experience of teaching may be such that knowledge about language will develop on its own.

One way of investigating the relationship between linguistic knowledge and teaching performance is through longitudinal studies that examine TAs' knowledge and beliefs about language as they enter graduate school and ask how that knowledge and those beliefs change over time. Assuming that, for the time being, even those programs with the most support from their departments cannot or will not require more coursework directly related to TA training, these studies should also include experimental groups of TAs who receive various types of explicit linguistic training during their apprenticeship. These types could then be compared regarding their effectiveness.

The problem of what to include in linguistic training sends us back to the question raised earlier concerning what constitutes sufficient knowledge about the language. One possible source of answers is the standards put forth by the Committee on Applied Linguistics of the Commission on Professional Standards of the American Association of Teachers of French (Murphy & Goepper, 1989, pp. 19-20). These standards use two general categories of knowledge — aspects of the French language and research in

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applied linguistics — to define a "basic" and a "superior" level of teacher competence. The descriptions could easily be adapted as guidelines for teacher competence in other languages.

As defined by the committee, teachers with a basic level of competence should know features of articulatory phonetics, phonemic versus phonetic contrasts in the language, sound–symbol correspondences, rules of word formation, the basic dictionaries of French and how to use them, basic word order, the major levels of style (including differences between spoken and written language), and culture-specific features of spoken and written French beyond the sentence level. Their knowledge of research in applied linguistics should include contrastive analysis, error analysis, the acquisition/learning distinction, cognitive style, discourse analysis, and the relationships among theories of linguistic analysis, the psychology of learning, and teaching methodologies. Teachers with a superior level of competence should know more about the phonological system of French (including phonological variation, the theory of distribution, and morphophonological generalizations), levels of style, topic construction, organization of ideas in spoken and written French, and important aspects of at least one regional variety of standardized French. They should also know the research fields mentioned above in more depth than teachers at the basic level.

The program is obviously ambitious, and in discussing its implications for TA training, Murphy (1991, p. 137) states:

> This imperative would…seem to require conscious coordination of academic work in learning theory, linguistics (general and applied), and language teaching methodology. More precisely, it would seem desirable for the graduate program to include a minimum of one course in language acquisition theory, one in applied linguistics, and one linguistically oriented methods course.

For schools that cannot afford this trio of experience, he goes on, it might be possible to develop a one-term practicum consisting of outside readings in linguistics and meetings that focus on the linguistic content of lesson plans and exams. For many schools, however, even the addition of a practicum would be problematic. Thus, creative ways must be found to incorporate this knowledge into existing structures.

Some guidance in developing appropriate training techniques may be available in a small but growing literature in ESL that draws its inspiration from the British educational reform known as "language awareness."

Proponents of language awareness argue that language is central to human learning, whatever the subject matter, because it is the medium of instruction across the curriculum. As described by Donmall (1985, p. 97),

> [W]ork in the field of Language Awareness is directed towards the development of the conscious perception of and sensitivity to language allied in explicit terms to skill and performance....The pupil already has high performance skills in and intuitions about language. These are the spring-board for pupil-based investigations during which the unconscious and intuitive becomes conscious and explicit.

Some typical examples of language awareness activities can be found in Thomas (1988). In one case, a worksheet containing sentences that participants in a teacher development workshop must complete by choosing between "some" or "any" provides the basis for a discussion of how these quantifiers may change the meaning of an utterance and, in turn, influence behavior. For TAs in French, this type of exercise could be profitably adapted to a discussion of, for example, the relationship between the periphrastic future (*je vais partir* 'I am going to leave') and the simple future (*je partirai* 'I will leave'). These forms, which are often taken to be interchangeable, actually differ in determinacy: the periphrastic form signals a future whose outcome is settled, whereas the simple form signals a future whose outcome is not settled (Blanche-Benveniste, 1984).[6]

One contrasting pair is *je vais avoir/j'aurai un enfant* ('I'm going to have/I will have a child'), a context where the choice of form indicates whether the speaker is actually pregnant or merely intends to have a child. The next example could be a pair such as *Les enfants seront?/vont toujours être les enfants* ('Kids will be?/are going to be kids'), where the statement refers to a general, indeterminate future and the speaker does not have a choice of form: only the simple future is possible. Sentence-level pairs where the difference in meaning between the two forms is not obvious, such as the above-mentioned *je partirai/je vais partir*, can then be introduced and serve as a springboard to a discussion of the role of context and the adequacy of the decontextualized sentence as the basic unit of either linguistic analysis or a pedagogically oriented grammatical explanation.

Another exercise described by Thomas that can also be easily adapted to other languages asks participants to come up with four ways of offering someone assistance and to grade each sentence for politeness. After explaining their choices, they must imagine themselves in situations (for example,

"You are in a hurry, but feel obliged to offer help" and "You are surprised your help is not needed") and explain why they would use one construction in preference to another. For French, contrasts between, say, *Ça va?* ('Everything OK?'); *Je peux vous donner un coup de main?* ('Can I give you a hand?'); *Voulez-vous que je vous aide?* ('Do you want me to help you?'); and *Permettez-moi de vous assister!* ('Allow me to help you!') can serve as starting points to a discussion of how word choice, address forms, and syntactic structure interact in expressing politeness. As a follow-up, TAs can also consider the role that sociolinguistic appropriateness plays or should play in determining the type of language they emphasize in their teaching.

These types of activity offer at least four advantages to the TA trainer. First, as the AATF Committee (Murphy & Goepper, 1989, p. 20) pointed out, "a knowledge of all aspects of linguistics as applied to the teaching of French takes many years to acquire." However, since these activities do not require any knowledge of linguistic theory or even much technical vocabulary, they can be introduced very early in the training program. Second, language awareness activities are simple in design and thus relatively easy to create and administer.

A third advantage to using language awareness activities is that they can be keyed to specific points in the textbook TAs use in the classes they teach. As in the examples I have given, the discussion of activities that seem at first glance to involve problems of grammatical analysis can be sequenced in such a way as to address the issue of how the decontextualized grammar explanations that drive the syllabi of current textbooks fail to take into account important generalizations about language functions and language use. TAs are thus encouraged to use their intuitions about language in evaluating textbook presentations.

Finally, and most importantly, while the knowledge gained from language awareness activities obviously cannot replace the knowledge gained from the systematic, scientific study of language that linguistics offers, these activities nevertheless encourage a way of thinking about language that approximates the way a linguist thinks about language. By looking at well-chosen contrasts, competing forms, or alternate ways of expressing the same idea, and by placing emphasis on the observation of how native speakers actually *use* the language rather than on how textbooks tell us the language *ought to be used,* we can help our TAs to become more flexible in their approach to the subject. These activities may also set them on the path toward more systematic study of linguistics and its subdisciplines.

Murray (1990), who has undertaken research to discover how the language awareness of ESL teacher trainees changes during their training course, reports preliminary findings that buttress the arguments I have been making here. Through semistructured interviews as well as examples of written work from diaries to language analysis assignments and two video-taped experiments concerning awareness of student errors, she has traced the development of 11 teacher trainees over a seven-month period. Her preliminary results indicate fairly clear changes in language awareness. For instance, she cites the case of one trainee who acquired what she terms the superordinate concept "difference between speaking and writing." Despite this change, however, the same trainee held on to the beliefs that "(a) spoken language can by nature sound 'rather muddled' and 'sort of nervous sounding…but isn't really' and (b) written language is 'clearer' and 'better'" (p. 27). How, asks Murray, will this trainee, now a teacher, approach teaching the spoken language if she holds these two beliefs? Shouldn't the training model be changed to help the trainee come to terms with the spoken language?

Conclusion

It would be tempting to conclude that what TAs need is simply more required coursework in linguistic analysis and to call for the type of comprehensive TA training first advocated by MacAllister (1966). It is possible that some departments, reluctant to give academic credence or credit to methods courses, might be more open to work they felt had content of a more "academic" nature. It is probably more likely, though, that requests for increased coursework that is specifically linked to training would not be greeted with much enthusiasm.

One alternative would be to replace the current model of TA training based on work in foreign language methodology with a new model based on linguistic training. Such a drastic move is unwarranted, however, since there is much that is positive about current practices. The other alternative is to modify existing programs to include linguistic training. This solution, though imposed by necessity, is not unattractive since it looks toward developing a model that integrates knowledge and beliefs about language with language teaching practices. It is time, then, for TA trainers to take a critical look at the assumptions behind communicative language teaching, the knowledge and beliefs about language that TAs bring with them into the classroom, and the kinds of training current models of preservice workshops

and in-service methods courses provide. Then we should go about finding ways to modify our programs to assure a better fit between theories of language and actual classroom practice.

Notes

1. Many of the ideas discussed here were first presented in a paper entitled "Rethinking the Foundations of TA Training," which I read at the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Annual Meeting, held in Nashville in November 1990. I am grateful to Deborah Piston-Hatlen for her helpful comments and to the editor and three anonymous reviewers for their remarks on earlier drafts.

2. Yaguello (1988) contrasts the linguist's objective approach to language analysis with the nonlinguist's subjective approach. What she terms explicative, appreciative, and normative attitudes lead members of the latter group to seek rational explanations for phenomena such as grammatical gender, to attribute to languages aesthetic or moral characteristics such as beauty or clarity, and to discredit all forms in a language that do not conform to prescribed usage.

3. A major component of the orientation described in Lee (1989) is meant to provide TAs in Spanish with the experience of learning a new language from a communicative approach. His reasons echo the remarks made in this chapter:

> Many of the TA's who have come through the Department have learned Spanish through the audiolingual method....Their learning experience would serve them well as instructors if they were going to teach with those methods. Communicative language teaching involves a different methodology, however, so they *need* an orientation to communicative language teaching. (p. 27.)

4. Explanations for the need for the verb *faire* 'to make, to cause' in sentences like *je fais cuire le biftek* 'I'm cooking the steak' (literally, 'I'm making the steak cook') often suggest that to use the grammatically odd, but parallel with English *je cuis le biftek* (literally, 'I'm cooking the steak') means that the speaker is claiming to be an oven or to be in the oven (with or without the steak). In reality, *cuire* falls into a class of intransitive verbs denoting processes that take place without reference to an agent and that require an auxiliary to make agentivity explicit. An example from English that illustrates how these verbs function and would help the TA who thinks of grammar as a system based on rational principles is "laugh": "I laugh," "*John laughs me," "John makes me laugh."

A common explanation for the need for the partitive determiner *de la* in sentences such as *je vais prendre de la soupe* 'I'm going to have some soup' begins by contrasting its use with that of the definite determiner *la* in sentences such as *je vais prendre la soupe* 'I'm going to have the soup.' It is then asserted that the speaker of the second sentence would be claiming to be having all of the soup in the world. This claim depends on the confusion of the notion of mass noun with that of generic or nonreferential use. In actual discourse it is unlikely that coconversationalists hearing the second sentence in a context where the first was appropriate would think the speaker was making this extraordinary claim. Rather, they would wonder to which soup the speaker was referring.

5. This type of argument has often been made in the broader context of preparation of foreign language teachers, however. For instance, the AATF Subcommittee on Applied Linguistics of the Committee on Professional Standards (Murphy & Goepper, 1989, p. 19) stated, "It is not sufficient to know a language; good teachers must know *about* the language. They must be able to explain, to the extent it is possible and desirable, why a language works as it does." See also Hammerly (1982) and Thomas (1988).

6. I am now conducting a study of 147 first-year TAs in French at 20 graduate schools throughout the United States. The preliminary results reveal that this contrast is not at all obvious to them. When asked to imagine how they would answer a typical beginning student question about the contrast between *je vais partir/je partirai demain* ('I'm going to leave/will leave tomorrow'), 36 respondents said the sentences contrasted in terms of definiteness and indefiniteness, but 12 of these assigned indefiniteness to the periphrastic form. Otherwise, in descending order, 23 TAs claimed a stylistic difference (either an informal/formal or a spoken/written distinction, with one claiming that the periphrastic future is "incorrect"), 22 TAs claimed no difference between the forms, and 20 mentioned a contrast between a "near future" and a "distant future" time frame. In addition, 17 respondents described the contrast as the same as the English pair "I am leaving/I will leave" without explaining what that contrast is, 9 talked of how the constructions differ in formal terms, 10 left the item blank, 3 said they were not sure, and 4 gave explanations that do not fall into any category ("the speaker decided to go/was made to go," "one focuses on the action of leaving, the other on the person leaving," "one focuses on the action, the other on tomorrow," and "they apply to different contextual situations." The number of responses adds up to more than 147 because some respondents gave multiple answers.

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