MANAGING PLACEMENT & GRADE EXPECTATIONS

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MANAGING GRADE EXPECTATIONS

- Introduction: Presentation & Previous Literature in the field

- ‘Grade Expectations’ Analysis - A Case study: Liberal Arts Program in CIEE Alicante (Spain)

- Outcomes

- Conclusions

- Future Research

- References
Presentation

- Professor of Linguistics at the UA and other universities (Spain):
  - ca. 150 Spanish students per year: undergraduate & postgraduate
  - Classes: English Language, History of the English Language, Computers & Translation, etc
  - Universities of Alicante, Barcelona (UPF), Valencia, etc

- Professor and Academic Coordinator for CEE-Alicante:
  - ca. 150 American students per year: undergraduate
  - Academic coordinator (evaluation criteria, academic appeals, etc)
  - Classes: Advanced Spanish Grammar, Semantics & Lexicology, etc
  - Also postgraduate students: Academic Director of Master Program in Spanish for CMU in Alicante (Summer)
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Previous Literature

- Concern about ‘reliability’ and ‘authenticity’ of placement tests in foreign language education

- Need to standardize grading systems in foreign language learning
  - Use of different models (ACTFL – IPA, OPI, TOEFL, DELE for Spanish)
  - Milton et al. (1986), North & Schneider (1998); Sparks et al. (1998); Tata (1999), Cherry, Ordoñez & Gilliland (2003), Fairclough (2006) …

- Need to standardize placement tests and grading systems in study abroad programs:

“The ideology of ‘student as consumer’ has changed the power relationships within the academy, placing satisfaction higher than intellectual growth as a measure of success”

J. Dresner
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Grading Systems Worldwide (some examples):

- **100-Point** grading scale: Canada, Egypt, South Africa, India ...
- **30-point** scale: Italy
- **20-point** scale: France, Portugal, Peru, Venezuela ...
- **12-point** scale: Denmark
- **10-point scale**: Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Holland ...
- **7-point** scale: Chile
- **6-point** scale: Bulgaria, Switzerland ...
- **5-point** scale: USA (chromatic variants with letter grade scale), Colombia, Russia, Hungary ...
- **5-point scale (reverse)**: Austria, Germany, Philippines ...
- **4-point scale (reverse)**: Czech Republic ...

- **ECTS** (European Credit Transfer System): A (90-100), B (65-90), C (35-65), D (10-35), E (0-10), F and FX (Further work required before credit awarded).

- **Other standards**: British National Language Standards, Eurocentres Scale of Language Proficiency, the ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe) Framework, etc
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Three basic assumptions:

- “Teachers are not taught HOW to GRADE” (international programs)

- “Teachers are not taught HOW to EXPLAIN their grading system to the students”

- “Students are not taught HOW to INTERPRET their final grades”

“The professionalization of language testing has two major thrusts: 1) the training of language testing professionals; and 2) the development of standards of practice and mechanisms for their implementation and enforcement”

Bachman (2000)
## Spanish GRADING System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sp. Grade</th>
<th>Def.</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>ECTS</th>
<th>Record Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>MH</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(only 1 in every 30 students may obtain an ‘A’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-9.9</td>
<td>Sob.</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8.9</td>
<td>Not.</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6.9</td>
<td>Suf.</td>
<td>Sufficient</td>
<td>D-E</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-4.9</td>
<td>Sus</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>F-Fx</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“There is no guarantee that the description of proficiency offered in a scale is accurate, valid or balanced”

North and Schneider (1998)
(UA) Spanish students:

- large groups, less interactive, less participative …
- Grade system based on final exams and some quizzes
- Results: 150 students approx.
  - 1/3 pass  1/3 fail  1/3 don’t take exam
- Grades (average):
  - 40% PASS  30% FAIL 30% NO EXAM
  - 5% A  10% B  25% C-D  30% F

(CIEE) American students:

- small groups, more interactive, more participative … MORE demanding
- Grade system based on quizzes, assignments, projects, presentations, papers, academic activities
- Continuous assessment: mid-terms & final, papers, projects, homework, participation, etc
- Results: 50 students approx. per term
  - 90% pass  10% Fail
  - 15% A  45% B  30% C-D  10% F
- Academic Appeals
**What grade do my students expect to obtain?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Spanish Students</th>
<th>American Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-B</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Potential PROBLEMS:

- **MISPLACEMENT** (not adequate level):
  - Are students placed in the appropriate level?
  - Do they actually meet the language requirements for that level?

- **MISINTERPRETING** (not being realistic)
  - Do students know what they need to do to get an ‘A, B, C’?
  - Are student expectations and faculty goals similar?

- **MISUNDERSTANDING** (‘study abroad’ = travel abroad, etc):
  - ‘Academic’ Program
  - Cultural Immersion Program (activities, field trips, etc)
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MISPLACEMENT Problems:

- Reasons for students’ unwillingness to move down:
  - No transfer of credits
  - Overestimate skills / capacity
  - Fear of no academic progress

- ‘Language and Academic Commitment’:
  - Close academic supervision (coordinator / teachers)
  - Progress evaluation
  - Tutoring service

- Problems resulting from students misplacement:
  - Academic Frustration
  - Lack of motivation, no integration
  - Lower the level in the group
  - Students’ GPA
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MISPLACEMENT Problems:

- PLACEMENT TEST (CIEE Alicante)
  - Three different levels for the placement test
  - Scores from 0 to 100
  - If a student’s result is lower than 30 points, we consider the possibility of advising the student to move to another level
  - Tendency: students willing to move UP (beginners → intermediate, intermediate → advanced) and not down.
  - Confirmation from Study Abroad and Advisors and CIEE Maine

“Fairness judgments appear to be governed by an expectation matching proposition; whereby if the expectation is met, the outcome is fair” Cherry, Ordóñez & Gilliland (2003)
Misplacement Problems:

- Number of students misplaced in the ‘Advanced’ level has increased consistently -- PLACEMENT TEST

![Graph showing number of students misplacement in 'Advanced' level for Liberal Arts Fall 07 Placement Test Result (43 students).]
MISPLACEMENT Problems:

- LANGUAGE LEVEL GAP: 77 points
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PLACEMENT TEST (CIEE Alicante), 4 last terms

Summer 06

Fall 06

Spring 07

Summer 07
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PLACEMENT Expectations

- Placement Test EVOLUTION:
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PLACEMENT Expectations

- Placement Test EVOLUTION – LANGUAGE LEVEL GAP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 07</th>
<th>Summer 07</th>
<th>Spring 07</th>
<th>Fall 06</th>
<th>Summer 06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placement Test Score</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 2006 Summer: 44
- 2006 Fall: 62
- 2007 Spring: 72
- 2007 Summer: 71
- 2007 Fall: 77

- 2006 Summer: 0
- 2006 Fall: 2
- 2007 Spring: 3
- 2007 Summer: 4
- 2007 Fall: 5
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GRADE EXPECTATIONS

- **DELE Diploma (Instituto Cervantes):**
  - Results for Fall 07 Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Intermedio - B2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Avanzado – C1, C2**
1. Preparing the field (beginning):

- **TEACHERS:**
  - Teacher Selection Committee (capacity to evaluate and ‘grade’)
  - Provide some past examples (exams)
  - Explain grading system, decide the criteria: **GRADE DISTRIBUTION (ranges)**

- **STUDENTS:**
  - **Orientation:** explain Evaluation and Grading System
  - **GET** the students **INVOLVED**
    - Agree on the final **WEIGHT** for each item (ranges)
    - Final PROJECTS --- **SELF-ASSESSMENT**
  - **GOALS** --> Questionnaires (beginning & end)
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OUTCOMES:

☐ GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

- Students may choose how the final grade will be distributed within certain ranges:
  - Quizzes 10 – 20 % → .................
  - Midterm / Final 20 – 30 % → .................
  - Paper 10 - 20 % → .................
  - Participation 10 – 20 % → .................
  - Homework 10 – 20% → .................
  - Present. & Projects 20 - 30 % → .................

Total → 100 %

☐ FINAL PROJECTS:

- Team work - End of Term ‘Festival’ (students’ participation)
- Two different GRADES (peer-evaluation and teacher-evaluation) → average
OUTCOMES:

- Questionnaires (first and last week)
  - Language: Placement Test
  - Electives: ‘Specific’ Questionnaires

Film & Literature: Two Genres in One
2. **Evaluating student progress** (during the course):

- **GRADING students academic progress (2 references):**
  - Personal grading reference (PGR progress): 7,8 / 6,8
  - Group grading reference (GGR average): 8,2 / 7,5

- **Academic Coordination and Supervision:**
  - Weekly Reports (teachers-coordinator)
  - Students evaluation of the class progress (oral & paper)

- **Academic Meeting:**
  - Week after midterm exams (teachers-coordinator)
  - Grade review
3. Matching results (end of course)

Final Grading Committee (3 teachers + coordinator)

- “Same-class Grade Uniformity”
  - Factors (number of students, students’ profile, teaching effectiveness, students-teacher interaction, student-student interaction, etc)

- “Same-student Grade Disparity”
  - Students’ expectations and final results in all classes
    - Direct Enrolment: exceptional cases

- “Potential Academic Appeals”
  - Students with C or less (final report - Teacher & Coordinator)
CONCLUSIONS:

- The language level gap has widened progressively

- Testing ‘uniformity’ and ‘coherence’: grading standards
  - Placing students (US universities, CIEE, international programs)

- Inform students (beginning, middle & end of program)

- Establish some academic parameters and provide ‘meaningful’ information <> ‘grade’

- Self-assessment: get students involved in their own evaluation (ranges, etc).
MANAGING GRADE EXPECTATIONS:

- Food for thought:
  - What about other international students willing to go to American Universities?
    - How to transfer their grades into the US system?
    - How to help these students adapt themselves to the new system?
    - How to overcome academic differences between grading and evaluation systems worldwide?

Video ‘Best Grade’
FUTURE RESEARCH:

More research needed about:

- Student’s motivation & final grade:
  - Fits my schedule
  - Transfer of credits (major/minor)
  - Class related to the program-location
  - It seemed ‘fun’ and ‘interesting’
  - Other factors: ‘friends’, ‘teachers’, ‘don’t know’, etc

- Student’s real performance (workload, dedication, effectiveness) & final grade

- Students’ expectations & Faculty goals
REFERENCES

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- Newman,
- Spolsky, B., 1993:“National foreign language policies: practices and prospects” University of Jyväskyla: Institute for Education Research