When considering strategies for tutoring foreign language writing students, the tutor must remember that “the primary focus of such writing practice ‘should not be the word, the phrase, or the sentence, but the larger elements and processes that must be integrated and synthesized for effective written communication.” Many scholars agree that in teaching foreign language (L2) writing, grammar should not be the highest of the concerns. The main goal for writing in one’s native language is effective communication of a message. As Writing Fellows, we are trained to consider global issues, such as structure, thesis, organization, and the overall communication of the meaning of the text. Therefore, our role is not limited to the point right away rather than starting with generalizations or philosophical statements. Prendergast also brings up the concern that compositions are often filled with plot summary and very little analysis. He reminds students, “I’m your audience so you can assume that I know the plot.” A good argument, is about the “how” and “why.” Not about the “what.” Professors also noted the concern that students do not always talk about the text. Kersch emphasizes the importance of matching the student’s expectations. For example, simple errors in subject/verb agreement in a sentence can cause the action to be attributed to the wrong agent, changing the reader’s understanding of the sentence. Prendergast also emphasizes that the type of error in a single phrase issue of lack of precision impedes understanding. He believes that along with subject/verb agreement, certain other aspects of Spanish grammar, such as appropriate gender of nouns and simple and complex tenses in the indicative, should already be solidified in 200 level writing.

When asked to identify specific problem areas related to grammar, Alvarez and all three instructors identified agreement between elements in a sentence as the primary issue in student writing. M. Stanley White explains that in Spanish, “agreement in number and gender is carried out in every sentence in the NP [noun phrase] except the PP [prepositional phrase].” For example it is a matter of expressing meaning.” For example, “la otra hija” for the article the (feminine singular), which modifies (the noun) all need to take on the feminine form to match the gender of the noun (hija). Errors in subject/verb agreement, in which the form of the verb (first person, third person singular, singular or plural) corresponds to the subject (the agent performing the action), are also common. As discussed in the preceding paragraph, such errors can seriously impinge the reader’s understanding of the student’s intended meaning.

Students also frequently have trouble with certain distinctions in the Spanish language that are not found in English. For example, the use of and, y, which translate to “for” or “by”, as a common source of confusion. According to Whiteley, the word pare expresses a goal of the movement; for example, the sentence “La familia salió para el parque.” “(the family, left for the park)” expresses the family’s movement towards the garden. For, on the other hand, is used for “extension or movement over an area by a point, whether through, across, past, down, up, out, or along it.” It also covers “prior or existing considerations.” “Por en adelante...” translates to “for her age...” These and other distinctions such as of/estar both translate to English in sentences commonly missused in L2 Spanish writing. Although these errors do not usually impede understanding because the concepts are taught so early and often in Spanish grammar classes, they fit in with students’ “low level grammar” that should already be solidified by the 200 level.

Although students know that their audience and evaluator will ultimately be their own instructor, the goal of a Spanish tutoring session or, for that matter, any Writing Fellow session, should not only be for the student to earn a better grade. As Writing Fellows, we aim to not only help students produce better papers, but rather to help them become better writers in the long run. To achieve this goal, we should be aware of what the student hopes to gain from the tutoring session and take care not to concern ourselves only with the mistakes in the student’s tutor warns.

Jennifer D. Ewald’s study on foreign language anxiety in the classroom, although concerned with speaking in the classroom environment, can help us understand student needs in the tutoring session. Ewald finds that students reported lack of confidence in foreign language classes which can be attributed to “lack of grammatical accuracy; classrooms’ perceived ability, and a need for additional grammar teaching.” AlthoughWriting Fellows are not in the classroom environment during a tutoring session, the tutor must still meet these concerns. As tutors, we know that Spanish instructors care more about a well communicated message than grammatical accuracy. At the same time, we should brush aside grammatical questions just because we need to concentrate on global issues. We must be careful to meet student concerns even when we feel that there are bigger issues to address. Ewald’s study also finds that students become discouraged when teachers only look for mistakes to correct. As tutors, we must remember that we are seen by tutors as authority figures, and that our comments can be just as discouraging as those given within the classroom environment.

As tutors, we must be aware of the positive feedback, Professor Kersch encourages pointing out students’ strengths and attacking their strengths’ confidence and also to provide him or her with a model for future writing. With some insight on the type of feedback to which students respond the best, the tutor will be able to avoid causing foreign language anxiety and help the student become more confident in his or her writing. Aware of some significant instructor and student concerns about L2 writing, I will now explore the most effective ways of dealing with these concerns in a Spanish tutoring session. At the beginning of a typical Writing Fellows tutoring session, the student provides basic information, such as the class for which the paper was assigned, the prompt, and any specific questions or concerns the student would like addressed. Because this information is extremely helpful for the tutor, this part of the session should not be treated any differently for a student writing in Spanish. The tutor should, however, make sure to clarify his or her role as a Spanish tutor—specifically, how feedback will be...
The Role of the Writing Fellow in Spanish Tutoring

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When considering strategies for tutoring foreign language writing students, the tutor must remember that “the primary focus of such writing practice ‘should not be the word, the phrase, or the sentence, but the larger elements and processes that must be integrated and synthesized for effective written communication.’” Many scholars agree that in teaching foreign language (L2) writing, grammar should not be of the highest concern. The main goal for writing in one’s native language is effective communication of a message. As Writing Fellows, we are trained to consider global issues, such as structure, thesis, organization, and the overall communication of the message as top priorities in every tutoring session. Why, then, should an L2 tutoring session be any different? It has been shown that the L2 writing process is actually very different from that of an author writing in his own native language. According to Jennifer D. Ewald, L2 writers tend to spend less time planning, write more slowly, and concentrate revising sentence level errors rather than on global issues. It follows, then, that foreign language writers would need extra help on aspects upon which native writers do not spend as much time and effort. Alice Ottmano Hadley points out, we cannot just assume that the presence of these differences can be attributed to the fact that students are learning a second language. Although global issues play a significantly larger role in evaluating SP 200 compositions, professors frequently admit that grammar is a necessary part of their grading scales. Professor Prendergast said that at the 200 level, teachers assume that basic grammar is under control but still expect to see mistakes. Barbara Alvarez, the Spanish writing consultant, also expects that there will always be grammatical errors, but that the degree to which they affect understanding will vary considerably. She emphasizes that grammar “should be less of a hindrance to the expression of meaning.” For example, one error in subject/verb agreement in a sentence can cause the action to be attributed to the wrong agent, changing the reader’s understanding of the sentence. Prendergast also emphasizes that the correct use of a pronoun issue when lack of precision impedes understanding. He believes that along with subject/verb agreement, certain other aspects of Spanish grammar, such as appropriate gender of nouns and simple and complex tenses in the indicative, should already be solidified in 200 level writing.

When asked to identify specific problem areas related to grammar, Alvarez and all three instructors identified agreement between elements in a sentence as the primary issue in student writing. M. Stanley Whiteley explains that in Spanish, “agreement in number and gender is carried out over everything in the NP [noun phrase] except the PP [prepositional phrase].” For example, “el pie derecho” correspodns to the article “el” (the article in this case) and “el pie” (the article “el”), while “el” (the article in this case) and “el” (the article “el”) correspond to the subject (the agent performing the action), the action, and are also common. As discussed in the preceding paragraph, such errors can severely impede the reader’s understanding of the student’s intended meaning.

Students also frequently have trouble with certain distinctions in the Spanish language that are not found in English. For example, the use of past and present perfect participles, which translate to “for” or “by,” as a common source of confusion. According to Whiteley, the word “para” expresses a goal of the movement; for example, the sentence “La familia salió para el parque” (“the family left for the park”) expresses the family’s movement towards the garden. For, on the other hand, is used for “extension or movement over an area or by a point, whether through, across, past, down, up, out, or along it.” It also covers a range of possibilities in English as “for” or “by.” Jennifer D. Ewald’s study on foreign language anxiety in the classroom, although concerned with speaking in the classroom environment, can help us understand student needs in the tutoring session. Ewald finds that students’ reported lack of confidence in foreign language classes which can be attributed to “lack of grammatical accuracy; classrooms’ perceived ability, and a need for additional grammar teaching.” Although tutors are not in the classroom environment during a tutoring session, the tutor must still meet these concerns. As tutors, we know that Spanish instructors care more about a well communicated message than grammatical errors. It might be that we should brush aside grammatical questions just because we need to concentrate on global issues. We must be careful to meet student concerns even when we feel that there are bigger issues to address. Ewald’s study also finds that students become discouraged when teachers only look for mistakes to correct. As tutors, we must remember that we are seen by students as allies and role models. When we point out what is wrong and what needs to be improved, we need to focus on the positive aspects of the student’s paper to raise the student’s confidence and also to provide him or her with a model for future writing. With some insight on the type of feedback to which students respond the best, the tutor will be able to avoid causing the student language anxiety and help the student become more confident in his or her writing.

Aware of some significant instructor and student concerns about L2 writing, I will now explore the most effective ways of dealing with these concerns in a Spanish tutoring session. At the beginning of a typical Writing Fellows tutoring session, the student provides basic information, such as the class for which the tutor is assigned, the prompt, and any specific questions or concerns the student would like addressed. Because this information is extremely helpful for the tutor, this part of the session should not be treated any differently for a student writing in English. The tutor should, however, make sure to clarify his or her role as a Spanish tutor—specifying how feedback will...
be given. The tutor should ensure that the student understands that the tutor is not on every single error in the text. Therefore, just because an error is not discussed, the tutor will not be able to comment on every single error. Just because an error is not discussed, the tutor will not be able to comment on every single error.

Next, the tutor needs a sense of the student’s past Spanish writing. According to Professor Kersch, if the student can identify typical patterned errors, the tutor will know what problems to look for.27 Professor Jorgensen also supports this strategy, emphasizing the importance of using old Spanish papers with instructor comments.28 If the tutor knows the student will be coming in (in the case of the Writing Fellows, this is also the subject of debate). Levels of directiveness can range from extremely direct, the student may follow the suggestion without explaining that if feedback is too indirect, the student may not know how he wishes to present his viewpoint or develop his ideas. This is why it is so important to ensure that the student actually learns to self-correct this error in the future.

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be given. The tutor should ensure that the student understands that the tutor is not answering on any single error in the text. Therefore, just because an error is not discussed, the student should not assume that it does not exist. The tutor should also remember that checking the correctness of the writing of a paper, a Fellow can simply apply these strategies in the same ways that we have learned. Thus, I will not discuss every one of the many errors that the student might make during the process of editing a paper, the Fellow will attempt to apply these strategies in a way that will improve the quality of the student’s writing.

Next, the tutor needs a sense of the student’s past Spanish writing. According to Professor Kersch, if the student can identify “typical” writing blocks, the tutor will know what problems to look for. Professor Jorgensen also supports this strategy, emphasizing the importance of using old Spanish papers with instructor comments. If the tutor knows the student well, the Fellow can identify one or two patterns in depth in order to help the student understand which errors are consistent and which are not.

The goal of tutoring sessions is to help students avoid making misleading or unnecessary suggestions. As Writing Fellows, the limited time we have in a session restricts us in our possibilities for discussing grammar errors. Therefore, it is beneficial to focus on a few patterned errors and to try to be as indirect as possible in order to ensure that the student understands his or her revisions, but we should not let the student leave without knowing how he or she understands why specific errors were discussed. Finally, we should attempt to instill good editing habits in our tutees in order to make them better writers in the long run.

Although there has been relatively little research done on foreign language tutoring, I have attempted to piece together the perspectives of Spanish 200 level instructors, authors of Spanish writing books, and scholars of foreign language writing and editing to write the appropriate role of the Spanish tutor for the Writing Fellows. This is by no means a complete guide to L2 tutoring, as many questions remain unanswered. It remains to be seen whether this research applies to all L2 tutoring or only to the Spanish language. Instructions of other languages, for example, may have different expectations for their students’ compositions. Students of other languages almost certainly will not struggle with the same areas of confusion as students studying Spanish. Although I would love to continue, this paper provides a general guide for Writing Fellows beginning to tutor students of Spanish writing courses.

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