

Case Study Final Paper

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Throughout the semester, I have had the opportunity to observe a colleague in the World Languages Department at Great Neck North Middle School, Mr. Ron Silva. Mr. Silva is one of three ENL teachers in the school building and he is fluent in both Spanish and English. To provide context within the ENL community, there are 20 ELLs and 10 FELLs in the school that receive services within their IEPs. Currently, there are only push-in and pull-out services based on the student's IEPs, however, it is important to acknowledge that this school district does not have a dual language curriculum. To illustrate the mosaic of languages spoken by the current students, there are 16 native Spanish speakers, 6 native Chinese speakers, 5 native Hebrew speakers, 2 native Russian speakers, and 1 native Japanese speaker.

Background and context

For my observations, I chose Mr. Silva's 1:1 class with only one ENL student, Daria, for the case study. I believed this would be a great classroom environment for my case study because Daria was the only student present, and she had this course in her schedule once a day for the entire week. To provide some background, Daria has just arrived from Israel, and she is currently enrolled in 6th grade. Before my observations, Mr. Silva had shared with me some important information: Daria scored entering on the NYSITELL, her parents speak English often at home, and her older siblings speak English fluently. As well, in Israel, Daria's school only provided her instruction in Hebrew. This given information above was crucial for my understanding, flexibility, and approach with Daria. Regarding my choice, Mr. Silva commented that Daria is very motivated to speak and enthusiastic about learning English because her family speaks at home. I believed Daria would be a great participant for this case study because of her motivation, exposure to the language at home, and class time consistency. Additionally, Daria is

enrolled in both an integrated 6th grade English class and 1:1 class with Mr. Silva. Mr. Silva is in all of Daria's content classes, which has provided me insight on her performance and interactions in large class settings. Mr. Silva has told me that Daria becomes very shy in her large classes and will be very hesitant to produce sentences or participate. I want to acknowledge that there is an advantage in this case study since Daria's surroundings and environment will not impact her emotions or initiate her affective filter.

In this case study final paper, I will be only focusing on my observations in the 1:1 class. I've chosen to analyze Daria's usage of phonetics/phonology, morphology, and syntax. I'm intrigued to share my findings about her syntax, morphology, phonology, and phonetics because there is a drastic difference in her L1, concerning the grammatical structure and characteristics in the Hebrew alphabet compared to the grammar structure and alphabet in the English language. This difference between her L1 and L2 has had a huge influence on her and command of the language, which has made me question Krashen's Monitor Model (1982), specifically, the Natural order hypothesis. To clarify, Krashen states that the L2 develops in predictable stages just like the L1. As a native Hebrew speaker, I found Daria's difficulties to produce and write in English very relatable to my own experiences.

Interview with Daria, ENL student

I chose to interview Daria during Mr. Silva's period 7, 1:1 class. Mr. Silva gave me permission to interview Daria. As I interviewed Daria, I held my iPad nearby, however, she was not aware that I was recording her. I intentionally tried my best to hide my iPad because I wanted to hear Daria's authentic voice and production of English. I started my interview by asking Daria personal questions about her experience so far at Great Neck North Middle School, such as the following: have you met any friends so far that you like? What activities do you like to do? Are

there any questions you prefer to do more than others? Do you have a favorite class? As I asked these questions, Daria asked me if she could draw her responses before each question. I allowed her to draw her responses because I believe that was a form of organization for her thoughts. However, I will acknowledge, Daria still had many pauses and had a hard time speaking in full sentences. I found this to be very interesting because she had an image to support her ideas, yet it was evident that she needed a sentence starter or a graphic organizer. As well, there was an evident moment where Daria felt nervous, and her body language was very closed. I decided to move on and guide the interview toward the two topics that she drew the most detail about: her friend Lauren and the sport volleyball. Positively, Daria was able to tell me about her favorite friend, characteristics about her, and her favorite activity in school by using single words or choppy or short sentences. Afterwards, I tried to expand upon these two topics since her body language conveyed to me that she was comfortable with them. I continued the interview and asked her why that specific activity is her favorite and what she likes to do with Lauren. As she was speaking, the change in her tone and willingness to answer was clear, which may have been due to her personal connection to those two topics.

In further detail, Daria was very well behaved during the interview and maintained eye-contact with me throughout the entire interview. As stated above, she tried her best to answer in a few words and produce short sentences. However, during the interview, I had to manipulate a lot of the questions and provide Daria with paper for her to process and draw her responses. Daria was not able to respond in the beginning of the interview, which made me question if the lack of sentence starters and a graphic organizer caught her off guard and triggered nerves within. Most of the time, Daria is provided a graphic organizer, visuals, or sentence starter to support her responses and time before she answers. I believe the component of spontaneity was

difficult for Daria in the beginning, but the aspect of choice really helped Daria in her responses, reflecting her interest in the topic of the interview. Yet, it is important to see how Daria was struggling with pronouncing the last syllables of words, maintaining the correct verb tense, and forming complete sentences with a subject and verb order.

Phonology/Phonetics

For my case study, the initial component of linguistics that I focused on was phonetics/phonology with Daria. Throughout my interview, I noticed that Daria had a lot of difficulty with her pronunciation, concerning the last syllable in two specific verb tenses, the present progressive and the past tense. For example, during the interview, I asked Daria about her new friend Lauren, and she said the following: *“Lauren attend North Middle School me.”* Then, I continued to expand about Lauren and asked her when she met Lauren in school and she responded, *“Lauren 6th grade and remember first day of school meet her [pause] meet play we in gym”* These two examples above represent how the participant would disregard the *“ing”* or *“ed”* for endings in the past: *attending, remembered, met, playing*. I began to question why Daria was completely disregarding these endings, even though she was taught these endings by Mr. Silva and in her English class. Daria’s habit continued for the rest of the interview, reassuring me of my hypothesis: Daria would have a lot of difficulty with her pronunciation in English and syntax because of the distinction in grammatical elements and alphabet in Hebrew compared to those in the English language.

Alongside my colleague, Ms. Kessar the Hebrew teacher and Mr. Silva, we all came up with the conclusion that Daria was unable to process these syllables because of the following reasons: the Hebrew alphabetic system is made up most of symbols that make up 20 consonant sounds and 5-6 vowel sounds, there is no present progressive tense, *ing*, in Hebrew, and there’s

different endings for the past tense depending on the stem of the verb. Additionally, the Hebrew alphabet does not emphasize or highlight the differences between the pronunciation of a long or short vowel nor address the variety of stresses in syllables within a word in English, which then may impede the student's approach for the English language. To clarify, in Hebrew, speakers are taught to only stress the last or penultimate syllable in a word.

Unlike Hebrew, there is a default ending or syllable, *ed*, to indicate an action has ended in the past tense, there is an emphasis on both consonants and vowels, and there are multiple tenses to describe an action in the present (present, ongoing, near future). Moreover, Ms. Kessar surprised me with her last hypothesis, the symbols in the Hebrew alphabet are not written closely compared to how one is supposed to write words in English. The manual act of writing in English compared to Hebrew is a clear indicator of the disconnect between writing a "complete" word in English and Hebrew by the visual representation of handwriting the word and in Daria's mind. Lastly, Daria's intonation would fluctuate often when she spoke, indicating her lack of familiarity with the variety of stresses in syllables and possible nervousness.

Activity for the initial component, phonetics/phonology

Referring to my observations and conversations with Mr. Silva, I decided to implement a game activity with Daria that resembled dominos. Traditionally, dominos is a game that is known to have tiles and numbers, where the player needs to match specific tile numbers to the same tile to continue the row or path. The game of dominos inspired me to create a game of dominos that focused on specific endings and tenses, such as: *the present tense, ing, and ed*. For example, one domino had a visual on two sides representing a person playing a sport while another domino had the word, *playing*, spelled out on both sides. Before Daria was able to connect each domino with its resembled domino, Daria had to pronounce the whole word,

identify the ending, and explain why that ending corresponded to the image. To provide context prior to the activity, Mr. Silva and I created a presentation that had different images that reflected different verbs and tenses. For instance, there were three images for the verb, play: an image of a girl playing with marks around her that showed ongoing movement (present progressive), an image of a girl sitting down and a clock (the past), and an image of a girl playing with today's date (the present). As well, as Daria was identifying each image, I asked her to record her initial response to each image and then record again after Mr. Silva and I explained each image and its context. I appreciated the aspect of recording and visuals for Daria because she was not only able to process the pronunciation through visuals, but also hear the distinct difference between the syllables. The act of pronouncing each verb to each visual began to encourage her memory and improve her pronunciation. Daria's ability to visualize each verb prior in separate images allowed her to flourish when she was playing dominos. As I played the domino-inspired game with Daria, I asked her why she chose to match *playing* with the domino decorated in the visual of a person throwing a frisbee surrounded by wind marks. Daria supported her answer by saying "frisbie moving and girl look not stop." At that moment, Mr. Silva and I understood Daria's logic since the marks surrounding the frisbee showed an ongoing activity and there was no indicator of time. As Daria continued to match more dominos to the correct endings (present tense, present progressive, and past) Mr. Silva and I praised Daria for her willingness to participate and for welcoming the challenge. It was evident that Daria felt very calm and comfortable since the informal assessment was hidden by a game. I believe the sense of comfort was key for Daria's participation and eagerness because she did not let her vulnerability or weak areas interfere with her ability to grow or understand. According to Researcher Halwani et al., (2017), shares an observation from his own study that encourages the use of visuals and

multimedia: “I realized that at the beginning, my students were confused and hesitant, until I started drawing and showing those pictures. At that point, they became active speakers instead of simply passive listeners.” (p. 56). From a World Languages teacher’s perspective, I find myself using a lot of games, visuals, and TPR in the classroom, such as battleship, bingo, dominos, and Kahoot, to decrease the sense of fears, triggers to the affective filter, and increase students’ participation.

Results of the Phonetics/Phonology Activity

The results of the phonetics/phonology activity were positive and showed a lot of self-motivation and progress since the beginning of the interview stage with Daria. I’m happy to report that Daria did not ask for a lot of support or needed redirection from either Mr. Silva or myself. On the contrary, Daria’s body language was very welcoming, and she was eager to look through all the dominos as she played the game. Daria’s response encourages the positive reactions and usage of visual aids stated by Researched Halwani et al., : “improv[ing] their self-confidence, comprehension, and concentration” (p. 56, 2017).

However, I do want to shine a light on the difficulty of pronouncing verbs in the past tense such as: kicked, walked, asked. Daria was able to match each domino with the correct ending of the verb, yet there was an aspect of hesitation always to disregard the last syllable, *ed*. Regarding morphology and tenses, this sparked an alarm for me, and I asked Daria why she kept repeating these verbs in the present tense, even though she understood it was in the past. Daria responded by telling me that the clock in the image was a huge indicator. She further supported that one stresses the last syllable in all the words, but the formation of “ed” does not correspond to the past tense in Hebrew nor is it a cognate. To clarify, the past tense exists in Hebrew, however, there are different endings and symbols compared to the English language structure.

Syntax

Concerning the second component of the case study, I decided to focus on syntax with Daria. I chose syntax because I noticed Daria had difficulty in forming her own sentences with the correct subject + verb order and creating full sentences during the interview stage of the study. For the majority of the interview, Daria was responding in single words or short, choppy sentences. For example, I asked Daria how she would describe her friend Lauren and she said, *“Lauren good friend”* and continued *“she Hebrew.”* I decided to ask Daria in the middle of the interview, how she felt before meeting Lauren and she responded *“I coming to school, and I not have friends. I frustrate before Lauren.”* Lastly, another example I want to shed light on is Daria’s detailed response about activities she does with Lauren: *“Lauren and me friends from to school. We go to park in day kipor and all Sunday going we to the Hebrew Scouts Movement.”* Overall, I commend Daria for contextualizing and processing responses for my questions, yet I observed Daria’s difficulty to produce thorough sentences that followed a subject and verb order. I tried my best not to redirect Daria or correct her responses in any manner. An aspect I want to shed light on is the absence of the verb *“to be”* in Hebrew. I believe this is key in understanding Daria’s difficulties with syntax because she cannot contextualize that specific verb, *to be*, in her sentences, which is commonly used when describing oneself or another person. To refer to one of the examples above, *“Lauren and me friends from to school,”* or *“I coming to school and I not have friends. I frustrate before Lauren,”* Daria clearly omits the verb *to be* in her sentences because she is transferring the knowledge of the verbs and grammatical structures from her L1.

Results of the Syntax Activity

Mr. Silva and I decided to create a comic book activity for Daria, where she would transfer her dialogue into a comic book full of visuals and complete sentences. During the

beginning stage of the activity, we allowed Daria to hear her audio recording and prompted her to choose three topics that stood out to her from the audio. Then, she was asked to write bullets about her favorite topics. Before Mr. Silva and I continued to the next writing stage, I introduced characteristics of a comic book, visuals, and the structure of a story. Daria really benefited from this pause because she was able to start visualizing and understanding the connection between creating a comic book and her bullets. During the brainstorming stage of the writing, we asked Daria to draw one image that went along with each of her bullets on a separate piece of paper. After, Mr. Silva and I isolated each visual Daria made and created sentence starters for Daria, which highlighted the importance of a subject and a verb: “*Lauren helped me by _____.*” or “*Lauren is helping me with _____.*” or “*Lauren and I are _____.*” These sentence starters were very helpful for Daria because she started to observe this new structure and support her responses with both the verb, *to be*, and the past tense. Moreover, after completing the sentences together alongside the scaffolding, Daria was then asked to put the visuals in order. Together, I helped her put the visuals in order and then I asked her to tell me the story of the images by using the sentence starters. For example, I asked Daria to explain her first drawing and she said, “*Lauren and I are at school.*” I was very happy to see Daria’s improvement in syntax and awareness of formulating full sentences with a verb and subject.

A challenge, though, that I noticed was her memory and usage with the verb, *to be*, once I removed the visuals. For example, Mr. Silva and I asked Daria to put away her visuals and explain the story by only speaking. At that moment, Daria was very confused, forgot how to start her sentences, and I had to remind her of some key points and details about her story. Her body language was conveying feelings of nervousness and I decided to bring back the visuals. Daria’s

initial response inspired me to bring a graphic organizer for the next day and identify key stages in a story or comic: a beginning, middle, climax, and ending. Mr. Silva and I encouraged Daria to place her visuals in the specific time frame on the graphic organizer. Daria worked independently since I allowed her to refer to her bullets and visuals. The visual representations of the graphic organizer kept Daria on task and allowed her to contextualize her story. To illustrate, I scaffolded the graphic organizer by providing labels in Hebrew next to the English and Mr. Silva and I acted out scenes of her story to highlight the different stages of a story. Mr. Silva and I tried to use TPR as a foundation to facilitate Daria's understanding. To clarify, Researcher Asher (1981) identifies TPR as the following: "TPR activities are conducted mainly based on storytelling, song, games, chant, rhyme and rhythm and so on" (Xie, p. 297). I believe acting out Daria's bullets allowed her to understand the arc of a story by observing her own in context. Researcher Xie (2021) supports my claims of acting out a story through the method of TPR in his own study:

"Importantly, the children are full of abundant energy, like skipping, running and stepping by moving their bodies. Applying for TPR with motor actions meets their [students] nature. In a word, TPR does not put the learner under stress, the classroom is so full of activeness, movement, happiness and so on" (297).

The next day, Daria was given time in class to create her comic on a poster, she colored calmly and transferred her dialogue into 5 panels as she referred to the graphic organizer.

Conclusions & Limitations

I want to acknowledge a few conclusions my case study has regarding both activities in syntax and phonology/phonetics. For instance, it is evident that Daria had different reactions to both activities, which may have affected her performance and capabilities. For example, the

phonology/phonetics activity, the dominos, was a great way for Daria to practice pronunciations while visualizing the specific picture in a comfortable scenario. I believe the visual-verbal connection was a success for Daria, when she was practicing and pronouncing verbs in the present progressive tense. Yet, Daria continued to have difficulty when she had to pronounce the past endings, since her L1 and L2 differ in grammatical structures and verb tenses. On a positive note, Daria benefited from the sentence structures, visuals, graphic organizer, TPR, and comic book activity for the syntax activity. Daria needed redirection and support, once I removed the visuals, yet I believe the activity was positively challenging and insightful.

Regarding limitations to the study, I believe the results of the study cannot be finalized since I only completed each activity twice. I believe that each activity should have been repeated multiple times to see the comparisons among different trials, observe statistical significance, and different responses. It can be inferred that the supporting stages, guidance, and TPR had a positive effect on Daria's performance. Looking into the future, it would be beneficial to do this experiment, where Daria does not have as much redirection and supporting materials/stages. The aspect of independence during this case study was not as recurring, however, Daria's level and abilities are not initially at the independent level.

Works Cited

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