World Languages Department
Unit-Level Assessment Liaison Report
Spring 2019

Liaison Project Start Date: Fall, 2018
Liaison Report prepared by Matthew Williams

I. Department Buy-In and Outcome Definition

During the early part of the Fall, 2018 semester, I began discussing with Andrew Aquino-Cutcher, Full-Time Professor of French at HWC, the possibility of helping him explore student acquisition of speaking skills in French. Specifically, Professor Cutcher was curious about the difficulty his students have been experiencing with pronunciation of vocabulary that includes specific French vowels and consonants that are not found in English. I offered to support him in my capacity as Unit Level Liaison, and I explained what that entailed as well as the multi-stage assessment process that the HWC assessment committee (AC) uses. He was excited by my offer of help and agreed to work with me.

We worked together to conduct a review of the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) from the course syllabus for French 101 (Online) during October-November, 2018. Both perception and production of French are focuses in this course, so two SLO options were explored:

OPTION ONE:
- A listening-based SLO focused on perception that we liked is stated as follows:
  - *Interpret basic French spoken at a normal pace*
- This SLO about listening is a kind of step one for students to lead them to pronouncing certain French phonemes in a target-like manner. It is meant to reflect the fact that a student must distinguish between phonemes before she can articulate them correctly.
- Professor Cutcher wanted to explore ways to help students learn to perceive and produce certain French sounds in the context of common French vocabulary so that they could be understood by a native speaker when they used those words in communicative situations.

OPTION TWO:
- A speaking-based SLO focused on lexicon development is stated as follows:
  - *construct French conversational patterns well enough to perform everyday functions and communicate effectively with native speakers at a beginner level [by] tell[ing] names, ages, origins, professions, addresses, phone numbers, times, dates, quantities, prices and spell[ing such words];*
- Using French vocabulary with a native speaker requires that the learner's pronunciation be target-like enough to be understandable to the native speaker. The class also emphasizes the phonetic nature of much of the spelling system in French, which means that the spelling usually matches the pronunciation. Thus, the following portion of that

SLO could be the focus of our investigation: tell names, ages, origins, professions, addresses, phone numbers, times, dates, quantities, prices and spell [such words].

By the end of the Fall, 2018 semester, we had chosen to pursue option one, Interpret basic French spoken at a normal pace, and to extend the assessment to include a speaking component in addition to listening.

II. Assessment Research and Design

I started to develop a tool that utilizes the sound analysis program known as Praat to help the students recognize target sounds within French words and reproduce them within those words in as target-like a way as they can. Instructions were shared with students to help them follow this new program (see Appendix A).

(Draft) Activity Procedures for Students:

- *Step 1 – Get familiar with the sound you want to practice*

    ○ Go to 'Web Based Resources' Folder

    ○ Go to the 'French Pronunciation Websites' document

    ○ Open the 'French IPA Chart with Video' website to find specific sounds

    ○ Consult Audio and Video Model of the vowel sound (normal and slow speeds) you want

       to practice

    ○ Go to 'Video Models' folder and open the doc of the same name

    ○ Open the 'French Video 2: The French Vowels' website

    ○ Go to timestamp 2:57 to see a diagram of the tongue position for the vowel [e]

- *Step 2 – Visualize the sound you want to practice*

    ○ Go back to the main 'French' folder and then go to 'French Vowels' sub folder.

    ○ Go to the 'e' folder and select a .wav file of that sound

    ○ Download that .wav file to your local computer

    ○ Open the program, Praat, and then open the .wav file you downloaded in Praat

    ○ create a spectrogram of that sound (and keep the spectrogram open)

- *Step 3 – Record yourself making that sound in Praat, and create a spectrogram*

- *Step 4 – Compare your spectrogram with that of the model sound from the native speaker and note any differences.*

- *Step 5 – Review all parts of Step 1 as you compare the two spectrograms.*
  - Use that information to adjust your tongue and jaw positions slightly and try the sound again
  - Create a new spectrogram using that adjusted tongue and jaw position
  - Compare the new spectrogram with your previous spectrogram and with the spectrogram of the original native speaker sound

- *Step 6 - Repeat Step 5 and monitor the changes in your spectrogram. Your goal is to have your spectrogram match (as closely as possible) the spectrogram from the native speaker-produced sound.*

- *Step 7 - Listen to a sound file of a short list of words being read by your instructor. After you listen to the list once, record yourself repeating each word using Praat. As you repeat each word, spell it out on the worksheet provided by your instructor.*

The tasks that I developed and reviewed with the instructor would achieve his goal stated above, but were too focused on production and not enough on perception.

By the end of the spring 2019 semester, in consultation with the Vice Chair for Unit Assessment, we shifted the SLO under investigation to option two. The following SLO will be used in order to more effectively measure the tasks that have been developed:*Tell names, ages, origins, professions, addresses, phone numbers, times, dates, quantities, prices and spell [such words].*

An issue with this SLO as it is written is that it can be interpreted in two ways.
1. It measures one thing: production of vocabulary (using two interrelated components, speaking and writing)
2. It measures two things: spoken production of vocabulary and written production of vocabulary.
Prof. Cutcher and I opt to interpret the SLO according to the version measuring the interrelated components of speaking and writing as tehy relate to the production of vocabulary..
What I will do now is add a final task to the tool that will require the learners to accurately spell the word that they have just pronounced.

III. Pilot Assessment Tools and Processes

We plan to conduct the pilot assessment over the summer 2019 term.

IV. Administer Specific Assessment

We plan to conduct the full-scale assessment during the Fall 2019 term.

V. Data Analysis

I plan to conduct data analysis of the specific assessment during the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 terms.

VI. Supporting Evidence-Based Change (Use of Findings)

This must be done once data analysis has been completed.

Success Factors

This process has been very beneficial in terms of developing a good working relationship with the French faculty. Professor Cutcher has learned a quite a lot about our assessment procedures and about our expectations for liaison projects, and he is enthusiastic to see how his students fare with this assessment. Given the sometimes negative perceptions that many faculty harbor about assessment, it is very encouraging to see that Professor Cutcher views our work as beneficial to him and to his students.

Recommendations

I will be able to provide these once the data analysis is completed.

Appendix:

French Phoneme Acquisition Rubric (Draft)
Unit Assessment Project for World Languages / ELL Department
Spring, 2019

Student Learning Outcome:
- *"Interpret French spoken at a normal pace"*
  - 'Interpret', here, has two components:
    - i. Perception (differentiating between various phonemes via active listening)
    - ii. Production (demonstrating 'i' via articulation of target phonemes)

Draft Rubric:

Levels	Beginner (1)	Developing (2)	Proficient (3)	Accomplished (4)	Total Points (20)
Descriptions	Unclear articulation of most **gestures**[1] rendering clearly the wrong sound	Clear articulation of some gestures renders an ambiguous sound that could be one of two possible target sounds	Clear articulation of most gestures renders a non-native-like target sound	Very clear articulation of all gestures renders a native-like target sound	
Phonemes in IPA					
/e/					
/o/					
/oe/ (closed)					
/oe/ (open)					
/ʁ/					

[1] An articulatory **gesture** is one of several elements that make up the articulation of a sound such as tongue placement, breath, lip-rounding, jaw opening, etc.