

**EDCI 590 INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH  
PROJECT PROPOSAL**

Name **Example**

Project Title The use of language tools in a foreign language classroom

I plan to complete my project in Spring (semester) 2009 (year)

I will have completed 27 graduate credits toward the M.Ed. by Summer 2008

Endorsement of Project Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**This proposal contains the following:**

- 1. Abstract of proposal**
- 2. Rationale for proposed project**
- 3. Research methodology for proposed project**
- 4. Contents of proposed project**
- 5. Schedule for execution and completion of project**
- 6. Annotated Bibliography**

## **Abstract**

My proposal for EDCI 590 is to conduct research on the use of language tools in a foreign language (FL) classroom. Such language tools include, but are not limited to: bilingual and monolingual paper dictionaries, hand-held electronic dictionaries, and web-based machine translators (WBMTs) (Read, 2004, pp. 151-152; Williams, 2006, p. 565). Although many language tools exist, FL students often use them incorrectly because they are unfamiliar with language concepts (Myers, 1994). Consequently, one of my goals is to identify which language tools students often use and the advantages and disadvantages of using such tools. My other goals are to determine the effects of these tools on FL students, how students use them, and how teachers can properly integrate the tools in their classrooms. To achieve these goals, first I plan to review appropriate scholarly literature. Then, I plan to conduct a needs assessment of students' use of language tools, classroom observations, and student evaluations of various tools. My final project will contain a comparison of the language tools available, the benefits and drawbacks of each, as well as ideas for tool integration in a FL classroom. The remainder of this paper contains my rationale, research methodology, and the contents of my proposed project.

## **Rationale**

The use of language tools in learning is an important topic in FL instruction. There are scholarly justifications and personal experiences that make this topic an applicable area of research. The reason I have chosen this as my research topic is because incorrect uses of language tools continue to arise in my own classroom, even in my seventh year of teaching Spanish in a local high school. Throughout my teaching, I have given numerous assignments requiring students to produce the target language (TL). Prior to most assignments I often address

the issue of using WBMT as a form of academic dishonesty. WBMT differs from paper and electronic dictionaries because this type of tool translates entire sentences and documents into the TL. Some of the products, or output, I have received from students do not contain work of their own knowledge. This is especially apparent when noting the verb tenses they submit in their final output which they have never learned in a lower level. I have also seen misspelled English words in TL assignments indicating that the words were unable to be recognized by WBMT. In such cases the student most likely used WBMT. Another problem I have witnessed is when students use bilingual dictionaries. Some problems students have with the bilingual dictionary are: the inability to locate English or Spanish words, selection of the appropriate TL word, and the inability to use metalanguage abbreviations to use a word correctly in a sentence. The colleagues I work with concur with similar examples. As a FL teacher, I am not confident in the ways I should integrate the use of language tools and will need to locate scholarly research.

Even beyond my classroom, there is a scarcity of research surrounding the effectiveness of language tools for language learners. Williams admits that very little research exists about WBMT and second language (L2) learning (2006, p. 565). However, he does claim that there is anecdotal evidence that students use WBMT for homework and writing assignments (Williams, 2006, p. 566). Read also indicates there is very little research available regarding the effectiveness of dictionaries and teaching vocabulary (2004, p. 152). In Europe, the research on dictionary use within language development and pedagogy is also inadequate (European Language Council, 1999, p. 33). Some European teachers claim that the dictionary should be integrated as a language tool simultaneously with language instruction, whereas other teachers would prefer teaching dictionary skills separately within the curriculum (European Language Council, 1999, p. 80).

Students may access various tools electronically such as hand-held devices, CD-ROM dictionaries, or translators and dictionaries via the Internet. Nesi indicates that electronic dictionaries are now very popular and predicts that the electronic dictionary will soon replace the book form of dictionaries (1999, p. 65). If paper dictionaries are soon to be replaced, it is likely that students without electronic devices or computer access will suffer, thus broadening the *digital divide*. However, Warschauer (2002) claims that increasing technology hardware will not solve the digital divide; instead more action should be taken to solve the *literacy divide*. Electronic literacy skills then become very important when using these newer tools for L2 learning. Shetzer and Warschauer address the importance of how students need to use the most crucial electronic resources to become autonomous learners by effectively using information technology (2000, p. 172). They advise that the development of literacy and communication using on-line media is essential in our global society (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000, p. 171). Hall agrees that students and teachers should learn how to evaluate technological tools that may be helpful in the language learning process (Hall, 1999, cited in Williams, 2006, p. 566).

There are many reasons why language tools present such a problem for students learning a second language. Teachers struggle with the use of language tools because of the numerous mistakes students make when using them. According to Myers, language learners have difficulty using bilingual dictionaries for three reasons: they do not distinguish the collocation of words properly, dictionaries have limited information about the connotations of words, and the learner has limited knowledge of TL words and grammar irregularities (1994, pp. 195-196). According to a study by Christianson, only 58 percent of words found in a dictionary for a student writing activity were looked up correctly (Christianson, 1997, cited in Bruton, 2007, p. 417). To reduce the amount of student errors when using bilingual dictionaries and to limit the student to their TL

knowledge, Myers recommends the use of monolingual dictionaries instead of bilingual dictionaries (1994, p. 197). However, if a student can never determine the meaning of a word within the given language environment, the monolingual dictionary idea seems contradictory to FL learning, especially within the realm of incidental vocabulary learning. Hulstijn, Hollander, and Greidanus found that the use of marginal glosses and bilingual dictionaries allowed for acquisition of incidental vocabulary. Students associated the correct meaning to words especially when they were repeated in a text (Hulstijn et al., 1996, cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 464). Another troublesome language tool is WBMT. Out of three free and highly-used WBMTs, Williams (2006) evaluated their performance in different grammatical areas translating from English into French. Williams encountered translation problems with prepositions, nouns, verbs, and verb phrases (2006, pp. 568-571). He found the most inaccuracy when translating particle verbs, such as *to wake up*, when the particle *up* can be located in adjacent or remote positions (e.g. *I wake up the children* vs. *I wake the children up*) (Williams, 2006, p. 571). These are just a few of the reasons why language tools are misused and ineffective for FL students and therefore a controversial topic within FL teaching.

As a FL teacher, I am eager to conduct this research because the results and information I obtain will likely benefit my students as well as my pedagogy. It would be logical that if FL teachers can appropriately integrate and teach about language tools, students are likely to generate more quality output while learning about the advantages and disadvantages of the different language tools available. Additionally, Shetzer and Warschauer (2000) and Williams (2006) both agree that the ability to use technology tools correctly is a key step in furthering a person's electronic literacy. The results of this research will be valuable not only to me, but to all FL teachers that are uncertain about the use of language tools for their students.

## Methodology

In order to understand the use of language tools in FL classes, my research methodology will include a literature review and qualitative action research. I will conduct the classroom-based research in three sections of level 3 Spanish classes, of approximately 90 students. The action research will consist of a needs assessment, observations of students, and student evaluations of certain language tools.

Before undertaking the classroom-based research, I will conduct a review of scholarly literature on language tools used in FL learning. In this literature review, I hope to answer the following questions: (1) What are the advantages and disadvantages of different language tools for learners and teachers? (2) What does current research tell us about how students use language tools? (3) How should a FL teacher integrate the use of language tools into the curriculum? The literature that I find will address these questions and provide insight for the action research I plan to conduct.

Before beginning the action research stage of my project, I will obtain the appropriate consent forms for IRB approval. My classroom-based research will address the following questions: (a) Which language tools do my students utilize? (b) What are their strengths and weaknesses when using various tools? (c) How do students interact and behave with certain language tools? (d) What beliefs do my students have of certain language tools? I will then begin the classroom-based research by conducting a needs assessment of students to determine their use of language tools. The needs assessment will allow me to compare my students' needs to the information from the literature review which I will have conducted on the available language tools and the ways in which students use them. On the needs assessment, I will ask which tools they used in a previous reading and writing homework assignment and how often

they used the specific tool. Within the same needs assessment, I plan to measure their knowledge about using various language tools. I will also give my students possible situations they would encounter using those tools, especially working with polysemous words. For example, students would have to choose the appropriate word in a given situation and ways to use different tools.

Young promotes need assessments because they allow for planning, decision-making, and the identification of problems that later helps to prioritize which problems to resolve (1994, para. 4). McKillip claims that needs assessments are advantageous for many reasons; a needs assessment guides the decision-making process about program implementation as well as creates awareness of a situation (McKillip, 1987, cited in Young, 1994, para. 9). According to Young, analyzing needs is a way to respond “to a changing environment and a changing future” (1994, para. 10). This needs assessment will be valuable because it will give me a starting point regarding students’ use of language tools, especially in a technological society that is advancing beyond paper dictionaries.

In the next phase of my classroom-based research I will engage and observe students in various activities with access to specific language tools that they cited as using often. This will allow me to answer questions (b) and (c) regarding student interactions with language tools. Based on the needs assessment and current research literature, I plan to develop an observation rubric to observe student behaviors. At the beginning of the observation, I will note the surrounding environment and conditions of the activity and situation. Gall, Gall, and Borg declare that qualitative observations allow researchers to get their own perspective of what is happening in a given situation (2003, p. 267). One benefit of qualitative observations is the emergent problems that may arise, or other variables that come into focus during the observation

(Gall et al., 2003, p. 267). However, an observer must exercise caution so situations are not over-generalized; observers should provide descriptive verbal portraits and reflective information of events that occurred (Gall et al., 2003, p. 272). However, a few limitations may arise if students claimed to frequently use hand-held electronic translators or dictionaries on the needs assessment. I will not be able to provide students with hand-held devices; however, students could bring in such devices and share. Another option may be to use demonstrations with screen captures of the device projected to the entire class. Also, I will have to be careful if students frequently use WBMTs, since I have a predisposed negative opinion of their effectiveness for FL learners.

To gain data of different perspectives and answer question (d) of my classroom-based research, I will analyze student evaluations that they will produce after using a specific tool. Collecting data from different perspectives allows the researcher to identify different situations and variations within the research, also known as triangulation (Waxman & Padrón, 2004, p. 92). I plan to have students utilize two to three language tools, per the needs assessment, in a short activity and then have them evaluate each tool to gain their insight about the tool they used. I will ask my students specific questions based on the literature review and observation results to gain their perspectives regarding the advantages and disadvantages of various languages tools and how the tools affect them. These evaluations will be similar to dialog journals in which they discuss the following: what they liked about the tool, what they would change about the tool, and if they think the tool helped them or hindered them in any way. Informal written evaluations will enable me to gain all students' perspectives instead of doing a class interview in which only vocal students may reply.

Finally, I will compare the observation and student evaluation data and hope to acknowledge student opinions that may validate or contradict my classroom observations in relation to the use of a specific language tool. I will compare the results to the information found in the literature. By learning the advantages and disadvantages of each language tool from different perspectives and the context in which students used each tool successfully or unsuccessfully, I should be able to draw conclusions about when and how to integrate a language tool appropriately in a FL curriculum. I will compare each tool that the students used by showing its advantages and disadvantages for FL students and for FL teachers. The final results of this research will certainly give me, as well as other FL teachers, insight into which language tools would be effective in students' language learning and development of electronic literacy.

### **Contents of Proposed Project**

I will begin my project with an introduction that will define the various types of language tools available to language learners and the problems that I have seen and that have been reported among students using certain tools. The literature review will address the following questions: (1) What are the advantages and disadvantages of different language tools for learners and teachers? (2) What does current research tell us about how students use language tools? (3) How should a FL teacher integrate the use of language tools into the curriculum? The methodology will explain the steps taken in data collection through needs assessment, observations, and student evaluations that I will have conducted in my classroom. In the data analysis, I will compare similarities and differences among student opinions versus my classroom observations of their use with various language tools. I will take the data analyzed from my action research and compare it to the scholarly research to determine if prior research

confirms or denies my action research. The conclusion will be the final section of my project. I will reflect on what I learned from the project that can help FL teachers integrate language tools more effectively into their classroom activities. The conclusion will also highlight further research that may need to be addressed, any cautions or recommendations for FL teachers, and the general benefits and drawbacks of using language tools in their classrooms.

**Schedule (Spring 2009)**

12/12	Obtain student consent forms
1/5	Complete 1 <sup>st</sup> draft of literature review
1/8	Meet with advisor (needs assessment) –UMW Break-?
1/12	Assess students' needs
1/14	Complete 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft of literature review
1/15-1/20	Analyze students' needs
1/17	Meet with advisor (literature review & analyzing needs)
1/28	Meet with advisor (observations, student evaluations)
2/2-3/6	Observe students using language tools
2/2-3/6	Conduct student evaluations
3/6-3/20	Analyze data
3/18	Meet with advisor
3/27	Complete 1 <sup>st</sup> draft of paper (Literature review, methodology, analysis)
4/3	Meet with advisor
4/6	Complete 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft of paper (Revisions, conclusion)
4/13	Meet with advisor
4/20	Complete 3 <sup>rd</sup> draft of paper
4/22	Meet with advisor if needed
4/25	Turn in bound (final) copy (2 hard copies, 1 digital)

### Annotated Bibliography

Alreck, Pamela L., & Settle, Robert B. (2004). *The survey research handbook*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Irwin.

Chapter 1 of this book reviews initiating surveys pertaining to needs and behaviors of subjects. In Chapter 4, the authors provide information on forming questions within surveys.

Barbe, Katharina. (2001). Mit dem Autoschwimmbad in die Verkehrsmarmelade: Learning to use bilingual dictionaries successfully. *Die Unterrichtspraxis / Teaching German* 34 (1) 66-75.

This article reviews the issues surrounding the use of bilingual dictionaries in a German classroom. The author also gives sample activities for introducing the dictionary in the foreign language classroom. Prior linguistic knowledge can make the use of any bilingual dictionary useful. There are also positive effects of teaching dictionary skills to students.

Bruton, Anthony. (2007). Vocabulary learning from dictionary referencing and language feedback in EFL translational writing. *Language Teaching Research*, 11 (4), 413-431.

In this article, Bruton researches the use of a dictionary within a student translation writing activity. He discusses how a dictionary should be used in translation activities and how effective dictionaries can be in writing activities, while also mentioning the opposition by Christianson that deem dictionaries harmful in student language development.

European Language Council. (1999). *Thematic network project in the area of languages sub-project 9: Dictionaries*. Retrieved May 31, 2008, from <http://www.celelc.org/>

This document, produced by the European Language Council, is an in-depth study of dictionary use across Europe and European universities. This report gives statistics of dictionary use as well as teacher and student opinions surrounding the use of dictionaries. Dictionary training is also a topic among students as well as teachers.

Fowler, Floyd J. Jr. (1995). *Improving survey questions: Design and evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

In the needs assessment I plan to conduct, this book will be helpful in developing questions measuring knowledge as discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter provides examples of good and bad questions in surveys. Chapter 3 also reviews the issue of question wording.

Gall, Mededith D., Gall, Joyce P., & Borg, Walter R. (2003). *Educational research: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

This textbook provides great information in Chapter 9 about qualitative observations as well as qualitative document analysis. Chapter 8 is about collecting data with questionnaires and interviews, which may be helpful in the construction of a needs assessment. In Chapter 15, another topic which may also be useful upon data analysis is that of structuralism which can be an approach to research dealing with relationships among elements of a system.

Gass, Susan M. and Selinker, Larry. (2008) *Second language acquisition: An introductory course*. New York, NY: Routledge.

This book reviews all theories and issues related to second language learning. A chapter is dedicated to lexical issues surrounding second language learning.

Hayati, Majid & Fattahzadeh, Akram. (2006) The effect of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries on vocabulary recall and retention of EFL learners. *The Reading Matrix 6* (2), 125-134.

In this article, the researchers determine that using monolingual and bilingual dictionaries among English foreign language students produce no significant differences in vocabulary recall and retention.

Hsien-jen, Chin. (2001). *The effects of dictionary use on the vocabulary learning strategies used by language learners of Spanish*. (Report No. FL 027513) Urbana, IL: 4<sup>th</sup> Conference on the Acquisition of Spanish and Portuguese as First and Second Languages. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED471315)

This article reviews the results of a study conducted among three groups of college-level Spanish students and their use of bilingual and monolingual dictionaries. This study provides great information on how the use of either type of dictionary affects learners and the strategies they employ or do not employ when having access to either dictionary.

Hunt, Alan (1996). Evaluating bilingual and monolingual dictionaries for L2 learners. *Kansai Gaidai University Journal of Inquiry and Research 6*, 15-27.

This article declares that the use of more modern dictionaries have the capability of providing more updated corpora linguistic knowledge. Another highlight of this article is the importance of training in the dictionary.

McCarthy, Brian. (2004). Does online machine translation spell the end of take-home translation assignments? *CALL-EJ Online 6* (1) Retrieved June 20, 2008 from <http://www.tell.is.ritsumei.ac.jp/callejonline/journal/6-1/mccarthy.html>

The author of this article is a French professor in an Australian university and provides the reader with specific examples taken from students' translation assignments. He also reviews the instructional advantages of Systran, an online translation machine, as well as

instructional drawbacks of the same system. The author also gives solutions and drawbacks on grading translation assignments in which students have accessed an online translator.

Myers, Marie J. (1994). Various perspectives on educational linguistics gleaned from a collaborative project on the use of dictionaries. *Language Awareness*, 3 (3-4), 193-200.

This article discusses specific problems students typically have using dictionaries and why students have such problems. The author gives recommendations to help students use a dictionary.

Nesi, Hilary. (1999). A user's guide to electronic dictionaries for language learners. *International Journal of Lexicography*, 12 (1), 55-66.

This article contains information about the use and benefits of using electronic dictionaries such as pocket dictionaries and computer-based dictionaries. The author also gives advantages of electronic dictionaries and why they are so popular in comparison to traditional paper dictionaries.

Nesi, Hilary & Haill, Richard. (2002). A study of dictionary use by international students at a British University. *International Journal of Lexicography* 15 (4), 277-305.

This article explains the ways in which international students used dictionaries to convey meaning in English at British University. Documents of their work using dictionaries were analyzed. Results of their dictionary use are discussed, especially noting that majority of the words were found correctly, but over half of the students had trouble in 1 out of 5 uses of the dictionary. The data of this study will be helpful in my research to compare outcomes with my students.

Pennington, Martha C. (2003). The impact of the computer in second language writing. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Exploring the dynamics of second language writing* (pp. 287-310). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

This article discusses the various ways a computer is used in second language writing. The author discusses students' perceptions of the computer and the effects of word processing. The article also reviews topics such as web pages, web sites, and the Internet. The author also describes the potential of such resources as well as potential issues using them. Attention is also given to the importance of developing electronic literacy.

Read, John. (2004). Research in teaching vocabulary. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. 24, 146-161.

In this article, Read discusses the most efficient ways of learning vocabulary, declaring that intentional vocabulary learning is a better method than incidental vocabulary learning. He also discusses the use of dictionaries in relation to vocabulary instruction

and problems associated with the use of dictionaries. He also mentions the use of electronic dictionaries and the lack of data that exists comparing the use of paper dictionaries to electronic forms.

Shetzer, Heidi, & Warschauer, Mark. (2000). An electronic literacy approach to network-based language teaching. In M. Warschauer & R. Kern (Eds.), *Network-based language teaching: Concepts and practice* (pp. 171-185). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

This chapter points out the importance of developing literacy skills especially using online media. The article also provides statistics regarding the use of the Internet. The authors also point out that teachers need to be able to show students how to use the tools available to them to help them use information technology.

Warschauer, Mark. (2002). Reconceptualizing the digital divide. *First Monday*, 7 (7) Retrieved September 22, 2008, from [http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue7\\_7/warschauer/#w7](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_7/warschauer/#w7)

This on-line article by Warschauer reviews the digital divide noting past experiments that provided computer technology to areas in the world that did not have it prior. He examines how providing skills, or literacy, to use the technology is possibly just as or more important than providing the hardware itself to those who do not use technology regularly.

Waxman, Hersh C., & Padrón, Yolanda N. (2004). The uses of the classroom observation schedule to improve classroom instruction. In H. C. Gaw, R. G. Tharp, R. S. Hilberg (Eds.), *Observational research in classrooms: New approaches for understanding cultural and linguistic diversity* (pp. 72-96). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

This book provides information on observations conducted in classrooms. Chapter 4 gives details for establishing a Classroom Observation Schedule (COS). The authors also discuss the importance of triangulation.

Williams, Lawrence. (2006). Web-based machine translation as a tool for promoting electronic literacy and language awareness. *Foreign Language Annals*, 39 (4), 565-578.

This article gives explicit examples of the uses of Web-based Machine Translation (WBMT) when translating from English to French and common mistakes that WBMTs often make. The author also discusses issues surrounding student use of WBMT and foreign language instruction. Recommendations for the instructional use of WBMT are given, especially in light of enhancing electronic literacy among students.

Winkler, Birgit. (2001). Students working with an English learners' dictionary on CD-ROM. (Report No. FL 026856). Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Institute of Educational Technology. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED459601)

This article articulates how well foreign language students use a bilingual dictionary, especially those on CD-ROM. The article discusses the advantages of a CD ROM dictionary and the useful tools it can provide for the learner. The article also contains a questionnaire for students on use of English language learner dictionaries.

Young, Grant L. (1994, Winter). Needs assessment in program planning. *College Quarterly: A Journal of Research and Discussion for College Educators Across Canada*, 2 (2)  
Retrieved June 30, 2008, from <http://www.senecac.on.ca/quarterly/1994-vol02-num02-winter/young.html>

This online journal article reviews the concepts of needs assessments, their significance, and the advantages of using them to develop understanding as well as improvement in a specific context.