

The Use of Language Awareness Strategies in the Teaching of Foreign Languages to Creole Speaking Students

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>The language de jure in Jamaica is Jamaican English (JE); however, the language de facto of most nationals is Jamaican Creole (JC). As such, there are many students who enter the tertiary level without fully acquiring JE. As a CARICOM nation, it is mandatory that foreign languages are taught beginning at the primary level of education. Although the main foreign languages taught in Jamaica are Spanish and French, this paper focuses on Spanish because of our proximity to Spanish-speaking countries, and because of the government's declaration of Spanish as our official foreign language. However, in spite of best efforts, there are still difficulties encountered in the foreign language classroom which manifest at the tertiary level. Some of these are attributable to the Jamaican language situation. Particularly, the linguistic background and language awareness (LA) of teachers and students alike. Previous studies have investigated the implementation of LA strategies within the Jamaican language classroom regarding the teaching of English as a second language. However, no such study has been conducted</i></p>	<p>Article History: <i>Received</i> September, 30, 2018 <i>Accepted</i> September, 30, 2019</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: <i>Language awareness, Foreign language teaching, Spanish, Jamaica language situation, Student-centred learning, Creole speaking students.</i></p>



on the teaching of foreign languages. This ongoing mixed-methods action research implemented various LA strategies at a non-traditional university using the communicative approach to teaching foreign languages. The effects of these strategies were examined quantitatively and qualitatively within a constructivist framework that embraces student-centred learning while incorporating JC. Some of the students' perceptions of and their actual performance increased after implementing the LA strategies. As LA increases, students' communicative competence and their ability to function globally should also increase.

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Introduction

The learning of a foreign language can be quite challenging for most students. However, for Creole speaking Jamaican students, the challenge is greater given the Jamaican language situation. Although the official language of our island is Jamaican English (JE), most of our nationals use Jamaican Creole (JC). There is a widespread lack of language awareness (LA) of both JC and JE even, and especially in teachers and students. Additionally, the Caribbean has created a model for teaching Spanish that relies on competence in the English language. Many studies have been conducted to learn more about the various aspects of the teaching and learning of foreign languages, both globally and locally here in Jamaica. Furthermore, LA and consciousness raising (CR) have been the focus of recent studies, especially for English as a second language (Antwi, 2015; Kennedy, 2017; McKenzie, 2013). Additionally, there is a renewed focus on

transformational leadership in education, especially in the Caribbean (Smith, Francis & Harper, 2015). This renewed focus also has implications for leadership in the improvement of LA. In this paper, the preliminary results of an ongoing mixed-methods study are presented.

Statement of the Problem

Creole-speaking students in Jamaica struggle to learn foreign languages; however, the problem faced is not linear. There are several factors that contribute to the complexity of the challenges faced. Firstly, the current models for teaching foreign languages in Jamaica often require a comparison to the English language (Cooper, 2007). As such, a working knowledge of JE is an unstated prerequisite for learning a foreign language but, most Jamaican students are not competent in same. Secondly, JC, the language most students use in both informal and formal situations is variable and superficially similar to JE, its lexifier. However, it requires awareness of the language features to recognise the real differences (Kennedy, 2017). Thirdly, the Jamaican language situation is also a complex context within which to learn foreign languages. There are three primary linguistic descriptors used to characterise the current Jamaican language situation: Diglossia, Creole continuum, and Bilingualism. Diglossia can be defined as “two separate language varieties, each with its own specific functions within the society” coexisting (Devonish, 1986, p. 9). There is a high or formal variety spoken by the upper class and a low variety that is associated with the lower class. In Jamaica the high variety would be JE and the low variety JC (Davy, 2016; Devonish, 2003; Evans, 2001). The Creole continuum represents the mutual existing of a creole variety and its



lexifier language. There are points on the continuum ranging from the most creolised form, the basilect, to the form that most closely resembles the lexifier language, the acrolect. The speech in between both of these forms constitutes the mesolect (Bryan, 2010; Davy, 2016; DeCamp 1971). Bilingualism, the third descriptor, is defined as the coexistence of two languages where one is considered strong and the other weak. For most Jamaicans the weak language is JE and the strong one is JC (Bryan, 2010).

This study began after the researcher noticed what appeared to be JC like formations present in the students' target language written and oral productions. For example, instead of saying *mi familia y yo* the student would write or say **mi y mi familia*, literally my and my family. However, what should have been *my family and I*, was translated to more closely resemble the JC *me an mi faamili*. This and other instances were initially attributed to the students' lack of exposure to the target language and their poor attitude towards learning combined with a general disregard for foreign languages. It was only after enrolment in two graduate level linguistic courses, and the subsequent increase in the researcher's LA, that it became more apparent that there were other contributing factors worth researching (Williams, 2019).

These challenges in the foreign language classroom are not unique to Jamaica as similar observations have been made in Trinidad for example (Cooper, 2007). Nonetheless, this particular study only examined the Jamaican context at the tertiary level. In conducting this action research, the researcher was looking for strategies that could immediately assist the students.

Purpose of the Study

This study was created in order to find a compromise between teaching and learning styles that would improve students' target language productions. The study would be used to enumerate strategies that augment the students' target language productions.

Objectives and Questions

The objectives included enhancing students' awareness of a foreign language using CR and LA strategies and improving students' performance in the foreign language using the same strategies. In order to accomplish the objectives:

1. tertiary students' responses towards the use of both their native and second language in the foreign language classroom were explored,
2. their perception of their performance after the strategies were implemented were elicited,
3. and their responses and perceptions to their performance on specific tasks were correlated (Williams, 2019).

There were four research questions:

1. How do students generally respond to the use of JC in a foreign language classroom?
2. How can LA and CR strategies regarding JC be effectively incorporated into a foreign language classroom?
3. What are the students' perceptions of their performance after these strategies have been implemented?
4. What is the correlation between student responses, perceptions and performance?



Literature Review

In order to ascertain more information that could help alleviate some of the challenges faced by the students, the literature review included research on third language acquisition, foreign language teaching and learning methodologies, language use in the foreign language classroom, a theoretical exploration of consciousness and language awareness, some of the studies conducted on foreign language teaching and learning, and those that used CR and LA strategies.

As it pertains to third language acquisition, it is important to underscore the difference between second and foreign languages. Although both are non-native languages, a second language is the other language spoken regularly in a locale but, was not the first language to be acquired. On the other hand, the foreign language is any language other than the first and second languages that is not spoken regularly. In Jamaica, JC is the native language, JE is the second language, and every other language is considered a foreign or third language. Third language acquisition studies have inferred that several factors contribute to the cross-linguistic interference that usually occurs. These factors can include the learners' preference to use the L1 or L2, metalinguistic awareness levels, recency, and the order of acquisition (Carvalho & Bacelar da Silva, 2006). This is just one of the factors to consider in our Creole-speaking context where there is the Creole and the lexifier. However, it is important to note that although these are two distinct languages, the differences are not as stark, and therefore not as easily recognised. Even within the Creole-speaking context the language learning and language teaching methodologies are the same ones utilised in many foreign language classrooms. Nevertheless, for this study, the Communicative

Language Teaching Method (CLT) was utilised and will be briefly discussed next.

The CLT is more than just a method; it is an approach which focuses on achieving authentic communicative competence. This functional teaching philosophy is rooted in using language as a communicative tool to attain communicative competence in addition to grammatical competence (Lovelace, 2007; Omaggio Hadley, 2001). For this approach to teaching, the target/foreign language is the primary language used in the classroom. The students are encouraged to use it to think, negotiate meaning, express, and interpret (Lovelace, 2007). The fundamental tenets of CLT include comparisons and contrasts with the native language, culture, communities other than the classroom, connection across other disciplines, and curricula that are content related (Ramsay, 2007).

However, in the foreign language classroom, the target language is only one of three that interact in the Jamaican context. It is arguable that the target language should be the one most utilised especially since in the Jamaican classrooms foreign language learning occurs in isolation. The students are not afforded many opportunities to use or hear the language daily, outside of the classroom. Nevertheless, second language theories endorse using the target language as the medium of instruction (Lovelace, 2007). Frankly, it is almost impossible to:

...deny all learners even occasional explanation of linguistic structure. People who attempt such hard-line implicit methods will swiftly come to appreciate the fact that they require an inordinate amount of time and energy;...This also goes for a methodologically inspired refusal to use the native language in the classroom:...(Sharwood-Smith, 1981, p. 159).



Theoretical posturing aside, regardless of how one categorises the Jamaican language situation, three languages interact in the foreign language classroom. “Therefore, for students that are already struggling to master a second language, alongside their native language, adding a third/foreign language only further compounds an already complex language situation” (Williams, 2019, p. 35). Ideally, JE should be used to facilitate learning in the foreign language classroom. Unfortunately, some students do not fully understand JE, therefore JC is used in its place. However, sometimes when JC enters the academic setting it remains, JE is not acquired, and the learning of a foreign language is even more farfetched. One way to approach the issue is through LA and CR. It is on the implementation of these types of strategies, in a creole context, on which this study focused. LA and CR are not easily defined concepts; however, one lens through which one might comprehend CR is the Noticing Hypothesis as posited in the 1990s by Richard Schmidt (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Jin, 2011).

Consciousness may be defined as any context necessitating that learners focus deliberately on, or pay attention to, the required information for learning (McKenzie, 2013). Therefore, any strategy that fosters the acquisition of information that students pay attention to is considered a CR strategy. According to Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis there are four concepts of consciousness: intentionality, control, awareness, and attention. Although attention and awareness are indistinguishable at times, the study primarily focused on the concept of awareness (Jin, 2011; McKenzie, 2013; Schmidt, 1990; Schmidt, 1994; Schmidt, 2010).

Awareness is “an individual’s subjective experience of a stimulus or cognitive content” (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011, p. 438).

Essentially, the things that persons pay attention to are the ones they become aware of. These constitute the very things that enter a learner's consciousness. Therefore, the more attention a learner gives a particular grammatical structure, the greater the likelihood of them being aware of, and understanding the structure (Schmidt, 2010). Notwithstanding there are some prescribed conditions that must exist for awareness to occur. These include a demonstrable change in behaviour that is secondary to particular experiences, documentation of the awareness of those particular experiences by the learner, and the ability to describe the encountered experiences (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Svalberg, 2007).

Language awareness in particular focuses on the form and function of the language being learned. It helps the learner to compare and contrast what is known, the native language, to what they are now learning, the target language. The learner also tests same using a series of hypotheses, and interlanguage, thereby increasing their sensitivity to the meaningful use of language (Williams, 2019). As such educators are encouraged to create more opportunities for authentic interactions to occur. Learning should be active and not passive, and affective factors should be considered alongside the cognitive ones. These affective factors include the students' perspectives on the LA strategies utilised and their implementation (Svalberg, 2007).

Therefore, concerning language, the main outcome for CR and LA strategies is an increased level of awareness of the functions of various grammatical and linguistic features in a given language. Schmidt also ascribes three degrees to consciousness as awareness: perception, focal awareness and understanding. Perception is defined as one's mental reflections or subliminal thinking on an



occurrence. Focal awareness or noticing is an apperceived input that involves subjective or private experiences which occur when a learner attends to the linguistic features that accompany the input. However, noticing is not the same as understanding because the former can occur without progressing to the latter. Understanding then is the highest order of awareness, and includes problem solving and meta-cognition (Jin, 2011; Schmidt, 1990). Further comprehension of awareness is fostered through understanding the difference between explicit and implicit knowledge (Robinson & Gass, 2012).

Explicit knowledge is the knowledge of which the learner is cognizant and can readily access. It is normally derived through formal instruction from focusing directly on language structures. Implicit knowledge is knowledge acquired without awareness that is used spontaneously. It is usually inaccessible to the learner's conscious memory and is deduced experientially (McKenzie, 2013; Robinson & Gass, 2012; Schmidt, 2001). When taking a test, learners often rely on their explicit knowledge but utilise their implicit knowledge for comprehension and production (Robinson & Gass, 2012). In our classrooms when the conversations continue unscripted, or during the dialogues amongst students or teachers to students, in answering open-ended questions, and when interacting, implicit knowledge is employed. However, in order for the changes in the classroom to be more widespread and affect the majority of the students, educational leaders must be trained to support teachers in facilitating students use of implicit knowledge as a means of addressing issues of diversity and social injustices that are present in the classroom. In so doing, the definition of "good" educational leadership is widened beyond the academic performance of the students (Smith, et al).

Lastly, a constructivist epistemology is used to underpin the use of CLT as the foreign language methodology along with LA and CR strategies given the Jamaican language situation. In particular Vygotskian constructivism, in which the teacher as most knowledgeable other (MKO) takes the students via social interaction across their zone of proximal development (ZPD), is the school of constructivism being followed. For this study, JC is used as the scaffolding that the MKO uses to move the students from the known [JC] across the ZPD to the unknown [JE and Spanish] (Schwieter, 2010; Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Although many studies have been conducted on foreign language teaching and learning generally, and in Jamaica, none have combined the implementation of LA and CR strategies at the tertiary level, in a foreign language classroom which incorporates JC. The teaching and learning methodologies have been studied, LA in high school students have been explored by Antwi (2015), and McKenzie (2013) has examined CR in a tertiary English language classroom.

Method

This study is a sequential explanatory mixed methods research carried out as an emancipatory and critical action research. As a sequential explanatory mixed methods research, the data were collected quantitatively first then qualitatively. In other words, after the data were collected quantitatively, further comprehension of the findings was afforded through qualitative methodologies (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2008; Morse, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). Additionally, a mixed methods research design increases the credibility and rigour of a study through triangulating the theory, data collection methods and during the data analysis



(Creswell et al., 2008; Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 2008; Jick, 2008; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007; Morse, 2008). An emancipatory and critical action research genre was selected because it allows teachers to reflect on their own practice and test different ways of improving same (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Denscombe, 2003; Glesne, 1999; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). There are several research philosophies that influenced the decision to carry out this emancipatory and critical action research as a mixed methods study.

In eliciting the students' perspectives regarding the incorporation of JC through both CR and LA strategies, the researcher was influenced by constructivism which is concerned with constructing subjective meanings to individual experiences through qualitative research. The transformative worldview mixes research theory with politics and social justice for the marginalised persons in society. Through critical and participatory action research, this study endeavours to not only identify a problem, but to also change the lives of the participants or the context in which they work and live. From a pragmatist perspective, a mixed methods approach was taken as the means of finding a practical solution to the problem (Mertens, 2009).

For this study, first access was gained through sending proposals to the gatekeepers at the site of the study. Once site approval was granted, a copy of same was sent to the University through which the Master of Philosophy degree is being pursued. The study sample was purposive in that it was both typical and convenient because, these students represented the average student in a tertiary foreign language classroom, and they were students that I taught. At the time of the study, three sets of students were pursuing the same degree course. For the purposes of the study the

strategies were implemented in all three classes. Initially, the third set was reserved as a control group, but secondary to low participation at the appointed time, the third group had to be included (See Discussion for further detail).

Once the requisite approvals were obtained, a draft of the questionnaire was piloted with a different set of students to check for reliability using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Once found to be reliable [Cronbach's Alpha = 0.848, Confidence level = 5%], the questionnaire was utilised as a pre- and post-implementation tool for data collection. Prior to completing the pre-questionnaire and the other instruments (pre-test), informed consents were obtained from the participants.

The pre-questionnaire consisted of thirteen statements accompanied by a Likert scale with options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. There was also a pre-test which consisted of five sections that tested for the acquisition of various target language grammar features such as *ser* versus *estar*, and number and gender agreement of nouns, their adjectives and articles. Whereas the questionnaires were submitted anonymously, the students used their school identification number when completing the pre-test. Once the data were collected the answers from the questionnaire were given a numerical value and the raw data inputted into Microsoft Excel prior to SPSS analysis. The pre-tests were marked, the errors loosely categorised, and the marks awarded per section calculated along with the total marks. The marks were entered into Microsoft Excel as raw data for analysis using SPSS. The frequency of each error type was also entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis via SPSS. Prior to entering the data from the pre-test into Microsoft Excel, the test papers were assigned a simple numerical code.



After the pre-implementation data were collected, the implementation of LA and CR strategies begun through the action plans that were created for each of the units taught during that semester. Although these strategies were not new to the foreign language classroom, the incorporation of JC alongside these strategies was the distinguishing characteristic. The manner in which the strategies were implemented can be related to Gagné's (1992) nine events of instruction (see Discussion section). Some of the implemented strategies included the comparing and contrasting of JC and JE grammar to that of Spanish; using relatable scenarios; requiring the students to use more of the target language in class; using music to aid recollection of structures, or the lyrics of a song to demonstrate the language features in context; having general discourse about language and its use; grammar drills; repetition; and incorporating target language culture while articulating the similarities to, and differences from the native language. After each session, the students' responses to the strategies, particularly their response to the incorporation of JC in a formal setting, were documented in the researcher's journal. The focus group members were also asked to document their classmates' responses to the strategies.

The focus group initially consisted of eight members, four from each of the first two classes that were included in the study. The criteria for inclusion were male student with the lowest overall average, female student with the lowest overall average, male student with the highest overall average, and female student with the highest overall average. All the averages were determined from the students' performance on three course work assessments in addition to their final exam score from the previous semester.

The focus group interviews were conducted in one of the regular school classrooms during the same period of the implementation of the strategies. For the duration of the interviews, which lasted for thirty minutes to an hour, the classroom was rearranged allowing the focus group members and researcher to sit in a circle. The interviews were semi-structured and included a general discussion of language use but, were primarily employed to ascertain the rationale for their responses to the questionnaire. The interviews also elicited the strategies that the students found most helpful and others they suggested for future use to aid them in the acquisition of the target language. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality the group members consented a second time prior to being interviewed, and they were asked to choose their own aliases for use during the interview process. There were four interviews in total that were videotaped prior to being transcribed. The transcripts were imported into the QDA Miner software for coding. Some of the coding frequencies were calculated and represented graphically using the same QDA Miner software (See the Results section).

The focus group members were also required to maintain journals in which they were instructed to document their classmates' responses to the strategies being utilised. The materials were provided by the researcher, and the students used their aliases to identify their journals. In addition to documenting their observations, anything else regarding the implementation of strategies, suggestions for more or other useful strategies, and information regarding language use could also be included. The journal entries were photocopied and relabelled using the alias and a number for each of the entries assigned for each focus group member. The photocopies were scanned and imported into QDA Miner. However, the scanned PDF versions of the journal entry were not



readable in QDA Miner therefore these entries, along with the researcher journal entries, had to be coded manually. A WhatsApp group was formed by the researcher to facilitate communication to and amongst the focus group members during the study. During the analysis of the results it was utilised to gather further qualitative data particularly for answering question three.

Once the implementation phase was complete, the post-implementation tools were administered. These involved the use of the same questionnaire and test that were previously completed by the students. Again, the students submitted the questionnaires anonymously but used their school identification number on the post-test. The same data collection, processing, and analysis procedures were followed. The student identification numbers were used to match the pre- and post-tests to maintain congruence with the coding for correlation analysis. Using SPSS, a two tailed paired sample t-test was performed on the raw data for both the pre- and post-questionnaires and the pre- and post-tests; the Pearson correlation value was noted. Each of the four questions were answered both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Results

The preliminary findings of this ongoing study are enumerated below for each of the four research questions that is guiding the study.

Question 1: The first research question – How do students generally respond to the use of JC in a foreign language classroom? – received a mixed response both quantitatively and qualitatively. Some students responded positively, others responded negatively, and in the focus group there was one student who was indifferent.

The data sources for this question included the students' responses on the questionnaire and the focus group. As it pertains to the questionnaires, recall that the answers were submitted anonymously therefore there is no direct correlation for the responses. As such the mean response to each question was noted prior to, and after the implementation of the strategies along with the significance of the responses.

There were approximately five questions on the questionnaire that were utilised either directly or indirectly to ascertain the students' responses about the use of JC in the classroom. The students had mixed responses prior to and after the strategies were implemented. Some of the responses did not change after the strategies were implemented. However, of note is the change in response to the statement about their performance in the language-based subjects. Initially the students did not think that knowing more about JC would assist them in that area, but after experiencing its use in the classroom the majority of the participants agreed with the statement.

The mixed responses persisted in the opinions provided during the interviewing of the focus group. Students oscillated between a positive and a negative opinion citing when the use of JC was acceptable, and when it was not. For some, JC should be used when the concepts being taught were difficult and were not being grasped using alternative methods. In addition, some focus group members suggested that knowing more about the structure of JC would "make it easier to understand the comparisons between languages, having properly grasped the structure and rules for JC" (Williams, 2019, p. 113).



My own observations of their responses to the use of JC were documented in a journal. Initially the students were not sure how to respond to the use of JC in the classroom. Their reaction changed from shock that a teacher would engage them on this level in a formal setting, to glee once they were able to make the appropriate connections. Overall one could say that a majority of students responded positively once they recognised how JC could be used in the classroom.

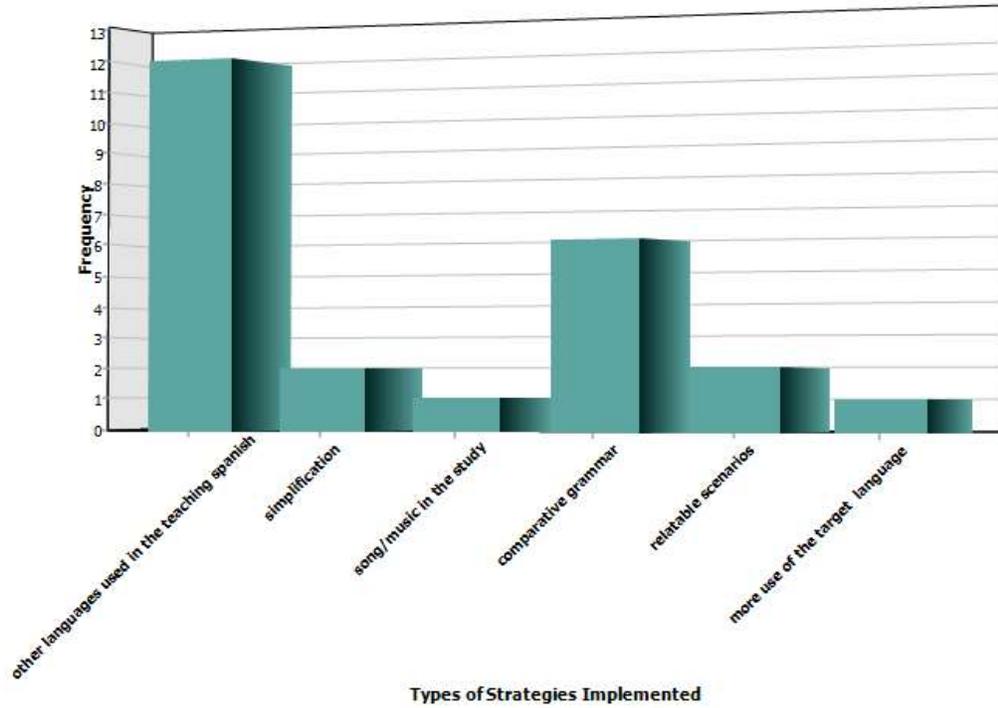
Question 2: The second question – How can LA and CR strategies regarding JC be effectively incorporated into a foreign language classroom? – was used to elicit how any lecturer, given what is known about these strategies can tailor that knowledge to meet the needs of their classroom. Again, for this question the data were taken from the students’ responses on the questionnaires and in the focus group. From the questionnaires, we find that most students agree to the use of various types of strategies that incorporate aspects of Jamaican culture and uses JC in the classroom. Most of the participants were initially uncertain of how having a textbook that was more culturally relevant would benefit them; however, once they saw examples of how the culture could be used as tool for comparison and contrast, the modal response changed from *not sure* to *agree*.

During the interviews and using the focus group journal entries the students also suggested some of the strategies they found helpful during the study, and those they wanted to see incorporated. The focus group members, in addition to listing the strategies they found helpful, explained why those strategies were efficient. Most of these strategies could be classified as the manner in which content was presented [cultural elements such as song and music especially in

relatable scenarios], and the guidance they expected from the teacher [simplification and explanation, the use of other languages in teaching Spanish and comparative grammar] (Gagné, 1992). The frequency with which each of these strategies were mentioned is represented graphically in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.

The strategies implemented in the study identified as helpful by the students and the frequency with which they were mentioned.



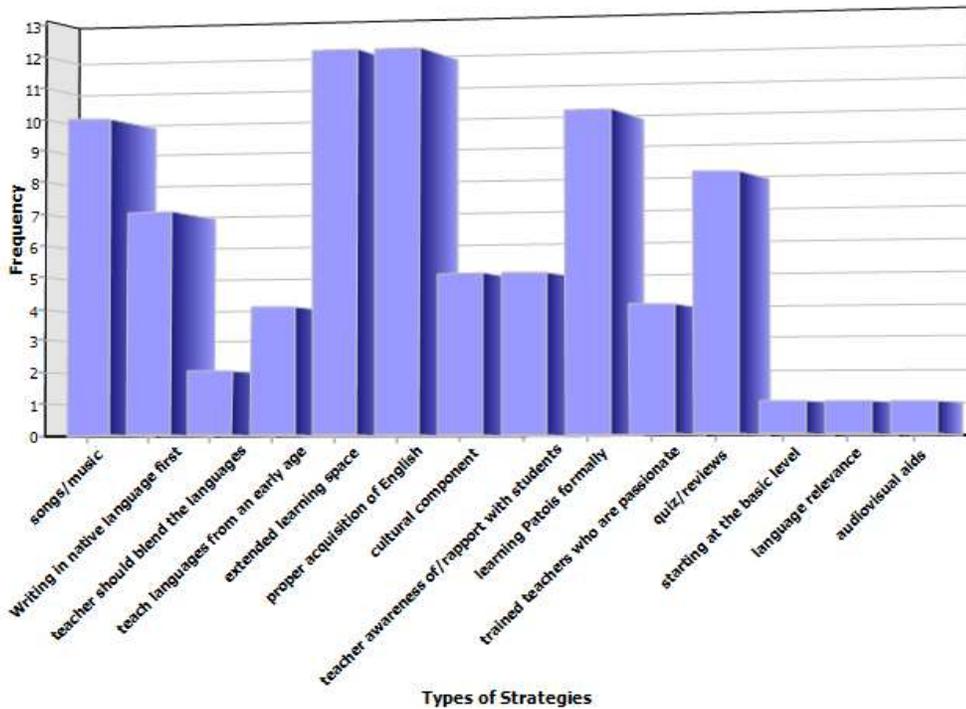
Note. Reprinted from “Language awareness in a tertiary level Creole-speaking foreign language classroom” by G. Williams, 2019, UWI Thesis.



Furthermore, the students suggested strategies they deemed important along with the rationale for their use in a foreign language classroom. The frequency with which the strategies were mentioned is depicted using figure 2. These strategies may be categorised as the manner in which content is presented [incorporating cultural elements such as song, music, games; using various means to present the same content via audio-visual aids], ones that provided learning guidance [formally learning JC; properly acquiring JE; starting the language teaching at an early age; increasing the use of target language and creation of extended learning spaces], and those that elicit and assess performance [frequently administering quizzes and conducting reviews] (Gagné, 1992). Some of the suggestions were for the teachers that were being employed. The students wanted teachers who are properly trained for, and passionate about their job in addition to a willingness to cultivating a good rapport with their students. The suggestions for these extended learning spaces, as made by the students, included having a Spanish club and planning events that allow the students to socialise with native speakers (Williams, 2019).

Figure 2.

The strategies suggested by the students for implementation, and the frequency with which they were mentioned.



Note. Reprinted from “Language awareness in a tertiary level Creole-speaking foreign language classroom” by G. Williams, 2019, UWI Thesis.

From the researcher’s perspective, articulating how to implement the strategies was more difficult than anticipated. However, using action plans were helpful in guiding the in-class process. Additionally, certain strategies were employed more frequently than others because these seemed to be the most helpful:



comparison and contrast of grammatical structures, repetition, music, games, and the use of mnemonics. What I have also learned during the process is that the strategies work best when used in combination with each other, not in isolation.

Question 3: The third question – What are the students’ perceptions of their performance after these strategies have been implemented? – was asked to ascertain what the students’ opinions of their own performances were and if that opinion was subject to change after employing an intervention. The data for this question were taken from the questionnaires and the focus group. According to the questionnaire results the only change in perception after the intervention pertained to their performance in language-based subjects. Initially, the students thought that increasing their LA would not affect their performance but, after those strategies were implemented, they felt otherwise.

Some students, without using the terms LA or CR, explicitly stated that their knowledge and understanding of the target language was better after the strategies were implemented. One student mentioned being made “more aware” and found the techniques very helpful. Since there was no question that directly sought out the students’ opinion, a follow up question was asked using the WhatsApp group. The students were asked “What did you think about your performance in Spanish after the strategies were implemented in the second semester?” The responses were mixed; some students said their performance remained unaffected by the strategies and others said that their performance improved. None stated that their performance worsened. One could assume then, that their perception of their performance either remained the same or improved after the strategies were implemented.

Question 4: The fourth question is, What is the correlation between student response, perceptions and performance? There is a general assumption that a person's attitude about learning a language correlates to their competence in that language and their ability to perform tasks using said language. Quantitative data for this question were taken from the two-tailed paired sample t-test conducted using SPSS. For each of the five sections on the test, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was less than 1 but greater than 0. This is indicative of a positive correlation between the strategies implemented and the students' performance on the prescribed tasks. However, where $p = 0.05$, the values were not significant. Regarding the total marks obtained on the test the value of the Pearson correlation was 0.752. Again, the number was not significant where $p = 0.05$. For three of the five sections on the test the descriptive statistics shows that there was an increase in the modal grade obtained for that section. For the other two sections, the modal mark obtained remained the same. In other words, there were some positive changes notable regarding the students' performance in some areas of the prescribed tasks.

There was also correlation testing done for the pre-questionnaire and the pre-test compared to the post-questionnaire and the post-test. There was an insignificant increase in the Pearson correlation value from 0.055 to 0.290 (where $p = 0.05$). As documented in the researcher journal initially, most students were able to recall the material on the day they were initially taught. During the next class session most, students were unable to recall the objectives previously taught, and those who did, were unable to do so with full accuracy. Although not formally analysed, when compared, the performance on the final examinations were slightly



improved for most students in comparison to the similarly structured mid-module test.

Discussion

As demonstrated in the findings, JC can be used as the bridge or a scaffolding to assist students move across their own ZPD from the known [JC] to the unknown [JE and Spanish, or another foreign language] (Vygotsky, 1978). Although students daily used JC, they were using it without an awareness of what they were really doing and without the realisation that JC is a language. This confirms what was found in the exploratory study about the LA in high school students (Antwi, 2015). The mixed responses to the incorporation of JC in an academic setting mimics the general perspective of Jamaicans towards its use although other studies suggest that it would in fact be beneficial (Bryan, 2010; Carpenter, Devonish, & Coore, 2007).

Once the students were made aware of what constitutes a language, they realised that JC met those criteria and they became more open to its incorporation in a classroom setting as a part of the LA and CR strategies. Notwithstanding, the incorporation of JC is not a stand-alone strategy. It has to be done in tandem with other LA and CR strategies. Using action plans the strategies were implemented in accordance with Gagné's (1992) nine events of instruction as it pertains to instructional design. Using CLT as the foreign language approach did afford flexibility to implement the relevant strategies while keeping the students at the centre of the learning process (Lovelace, 2007; Overby, 2011). However, when the students understood the objectives, although they at times would get discouraged, their motivation increased and the perceptions of their

own performance improved. This improved perception seemed to correlate positively with their actual performance even though the improvements were not drastic. This particular finding is similar to what McKenzie (2013) found when she tried to find out CR strategies that would aid the production of grammatically correct JE sentences in the written discourses of first year tertiary students.

Regardless of their perceptions about their proficiency in JE all the students in the focus group still produced written journal entries that had numerous grammatical errors evidencing that there is more work required to improve their competence. The struggle to express themselves in JE was also very apparent during the interview sessions. They would often switch to JC or use ungrammatical JE to compensate. Notwithstanding, there were some minimal improvements noted for which the Pearson correlation value was not significant. These findings are also similar to those obtained by McKenzie (2013).

Regarding the Pearson correlation values not being significant where $p = 0.05$, there are several plausible reasons. Firstly, there was a difference between the number of participants who completed the pre- and post-instruments. Although the students were initially very excited to participate in a study on the pre-planned date for the administering of the test and questionnaire, there was reluctance. Various reasons were offered: some students claimed they forgot, and others cited the lack of compensation. At the predesignated time for the administering of the post-instruments most students were absent. The post-instruments were administered closer to the end of the regular semester, and it is commonly observed that general class attendance tends to dwindle at this time of the year. In addition, regarding the completion of the test, some students left as much as



fifty percent of the test blank. This could have been secondary to not realising there was a second page in spite of a verbal indication. Or it could have been that the students did not know how to answer the question type and left the section blank. Perhaps because it was not a “real test” they did not think it necessary to give their best efforts even though they were asked to do that (Williams, 2019).

A second reason might be the time period over which the implementation occurred, which is the same as the time span between the administering of the pre- and post-instruments. This time frame was approximately three months, the equivalent of one academic semester, for some. Perhaps if the strategies were implemented for a longer timeframe the students would be better helped. This particular reason was cited by McKenzie (2013) as one reason there was no dramatic improvement.

Thirdly, it became increasingly apparent that the students really did not comprehend JE. During the interviews at times the questions would have to be explained several times, particularly when reviewing the statements on the questionnaire. The explanations were often followed by “a dat yu did mean miss?” Sometimes the responses would even change after they better understood what was required. Further evidence of the lacking in comprehension of JE was seen in the journal entries. Some of the focus group members did not follow the instructions given for the journal entry data. It can then be assumed that some of the responses to the questionnaire statements might in verity be inaccurate because of a misunderstanding of what was required. It is important therefore, that those tasked with educating the future citizens of our nation, recognize the barriers that present themselves in the language classroom and devise strategies that are socially just to assist our students to fully acquire Jamaican

English and the foreign languages while recognizing the implicit knowledge they carry from their varied experiences.

Conclusion

In summary, there are at least three main conclusions that can be offered from these preliminary findings. Firstly, once the students' LA and knowledge about language increases there will be an increase in their overall academic performance especially in areas that rely heavily on language. However, the timeframe during which the LA strategies are incorporated is related to the level of improvement that will be attained. Secondly, the affective filter was lowered through a positive change in the students' perception of JC and their performance. When the affective filter is low, it engenders learning because the students are more comfortable. Thirdly, more research is still required in this area to further unpack issues present in the language classroom.

Therefore, the recommendations for future studies can be categorised in three ways. Firstly, there is still a need to further understand and test how to implement LA and CR strategies, especially in a standardised manner that is tailored to our Creole-speaking context. The timeframe during which the strategies are implemented should be increased. Perhaps the strategies can be implemented starting at the primary and secondary levels of education, especially where the students are being introduced to JE grammatical structures and concepts. Secondly, the increasing of LA should extend to the teachers as well. As such, those employed to teach language should be afforded training that would increase their Teacher Language Awareness (TLA) in addition to their proficiency in the language. Teachers should also be mandated to continue their



training as is required of other professions as well as conduct research to augment their practices and instructional delivery. TLA should be an integral part of any educational leader's plan to transform their institution. Additionally, social justice in education requires that every student receive quality education and training. Therefore, for the teachers to provide this quality education for their students, they too must receive quality training.

Lastly, the final recommendation is secondary to one of the strategies the students gave to improve their acquisition of language. LA involves learning about the forms, features and functions of languages. As such, the creation of [more] extended learning spaces in which the students can use the target language outside of the classroom is important. Once the interest in the target language is cultivated, it can be maintained by demonstrating the language relevance and through relatable immersion experiences. Although some institutions might have language clubs and celebrate language days, those do not exist at the research site. The students who participated in the focus group were adamant that in addition to partial and full immersion trips, the establishing of clubs and language days would be integral to them continuing to use the language even after meeting their academic requirements.

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