

Improving Oral Reading Skills Through Topic Engagement and Students Designed Assessment

Students Intermediate Spanish II Fall 2013
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Intermediate Spanish II

- Intermediate Spanish II is the final Spanish course for the general education program, and is a gateway course to the minor/major Spanish programs.
- The main goal for Intermediate Spanish II is to help students develop listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing skills in Spanish.

ORAL READING

Oral reading is an activity that aids to accomplish the Intermediate Spanish II's course learning outcomes, where the production of oral and written text is emphasized.

The accomplishment of these CLOs contributes to achieving a higher-level outcome: the Spanish program learning outcomes, which expects students to develop supporting skills in critical thinking, writing expression, reading, listening and oral proficiency in Spanish.

Project Main Goals

- Because of **suggestions** from my students, we developed a project to improve their oral reading skills in Spanish.
- This project looked for a more expressive oral reading as a result of giving the students the ownership of the project and engaging them with the topic and the design of related assessment tools.
- This project **concentrated** in reading aloud. In addition, it broadened its benefits for other skills, such as understanding, speaking, analyzing and writing.
- The instructor's role was guiding and supporting the students' activity.

Project Activities

- 1- The students were required to suggest a topic of research for this project: Death penalty in the USA.
- 2- The students were required to suggest an opinion article (in Spanish) about this topic: “Death penalty, worthless penalty” by journalist Jorge Ramos.
- 3- Students and instructor practiced in class to read the article aloud, and corrected some problems with the diction.
- 4- Students and instructor designed a rubric to evaluate the students’ oral reading skills (**see rubric**).

Appendix 2

University of California Merced Rubric to evaluate oral reading skills



	Excellent 25 Points	Good 20 Points	Basic 15 Points	Poor 10 Points
Volume	It can be heard by all in the audience	Volume gets lower with difficult to pronounce words	Speaks softly, it's difficult to be heard	It is completely hard to understand what is being read.
Fluidity	Reads without hesitation	Hesitates in no more than four difficult to pronounce or unknown words	Omission of more than four syllables or words.	Lacks expression and fluency. Constant Stuttering
Intonation	Voice tone to emphasize important content.	Follow text punctuation fairly well, but lacks intonation.	Speaks in a monotone way.	Do not change tone where appropriate
Vocalization	Articulates words clearly. Exceeds pronunciation. Makes distinction between vowels, consonants and syllables.	Articulates most words clearly. Makes distinction between most vowels, consonants and syllables. 1 to 5 wrong	Makes mistakes in pronunciation of vowels, consonants and syllables 6 to 10 wrong	Mumbles words. It is difficult to understand More than 10 wrong.



Project Activities

- 5- Students recorded an audio file of a previously selected paragraph of the article, and uploaded it in an online resource folder, assigned for this purpose.
- 6- The instructor listened to the recordings and use the rubric to appraise vocalization, intonation, fluidity and volume.
- 7- The instructor wrote reports to provide general and individual feedback to the students, answered questions, made suggestions and adjustments.

**Appendix 3
REPORT**

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Rubric to give feedback on the performance of the oral reading skills

	Excellent 25 Points	Good 20 Points	Basic 15 Points	Poor 10 Points	Comments
Volume	It can be heard by all in the audience.	Volume gets lower with difficult to pronounce words _____ _____ _____ _____	Speaks softly, it's difficult to be heard	It is completed hard to understand what is being read.	
Fluidity	Reads without hesitation	Hesitates in no more than four difficult to pronounce or unknown words _____ _____ _____ _____	Omission of more than four syllables or words. _____ _____ _____ _____	Lacks expression and fluency. Constant Stuttering _____ _____ _____ _____	
Intonation	Voice tone to emphasize important content.	Follow text punctuation fairly well, but lacks intonation.	Speaks in a monotone way.	Do no change tone where appropriate	
Vocalization	Articulates words clearly. Exceeds pronunciation. Makes distinction between vowels, consonants and syllables.	Articulates most words clearly. Makes distinction between most vowels, consonants and syllables. 1 to 5 wrong _____ _____ _____ _____	Makes mistakes in pronunciation of vowels, consonants and syllables 6 to 10 wrong _____ _____ _____ _____	Mumbles words. It is difficult to understand More than 10 wrong. _____ _____ _____ _____	

Project Activities – Second Part

- 8- Students and instructor designed a guideline to analyze the selected article (**see guideline**).
- 9- Students wrote comments about the selected article and shared them with the class to get feedback.
- 10- Students wrote the final analysis of the article, and recorded an audio file with their conclusions. Then uploaded it in an online resource folder, assigned for this purpose.

Guideline to analyze the article “Pena de muerte, pena inútil” by Jorge Ramos

- 1- What is the thesis of this article? What is Ramos trying to convince us of?
- 2- Make a list of facts and another one of opinions presented by Ramos in this article.
- 3- What are the supporting arguments presented for Ramos in the article?
- 4- To learn about the origins, history, and different opinions about the death penalty in the USA, research articles that provides you with basic information about this topic, and/or read the articles provided by the instructor:

“U.S. Death Penalty facts” www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/death-penalty/us-death-penalty-facts

“Religious Characteristics and the Death Penalty” by Monica K. Miller and R. David Hayward

“Racial Differences in Death Penalty Support and Opposition: A Preliminary Study of White and Black College Students” by David N. Baker, Eric G. Lambert and Morris Jenkins

“Persuasion and Resistance: Race and the Death Penalty in America” by Mark Peffley and Jon Hurwitz,”

“La última palabra: ¿PENA DE MUERTE?” by Martín Anglada.

- 5- To develop your own opinion, analyze the arguments you have read, think about the different perspectives. Look for strengths and weakness in them.
- 6- Try to answer questions like:
 - What is the origin of the death penalty?
 - What are the objectives of the death penalty?
 - Is this penalty achieving its goals?
 - What are the death penalty methods in the United States?
 - What countries and what USA States apply this measure?
 - What is the relationship between religion and death penalty?
 - What is the relationship between “race” and death penalty?
 - Do you agree or disagree with Ramos’ main idea presented in the article in question?
 - Why yes or why not?

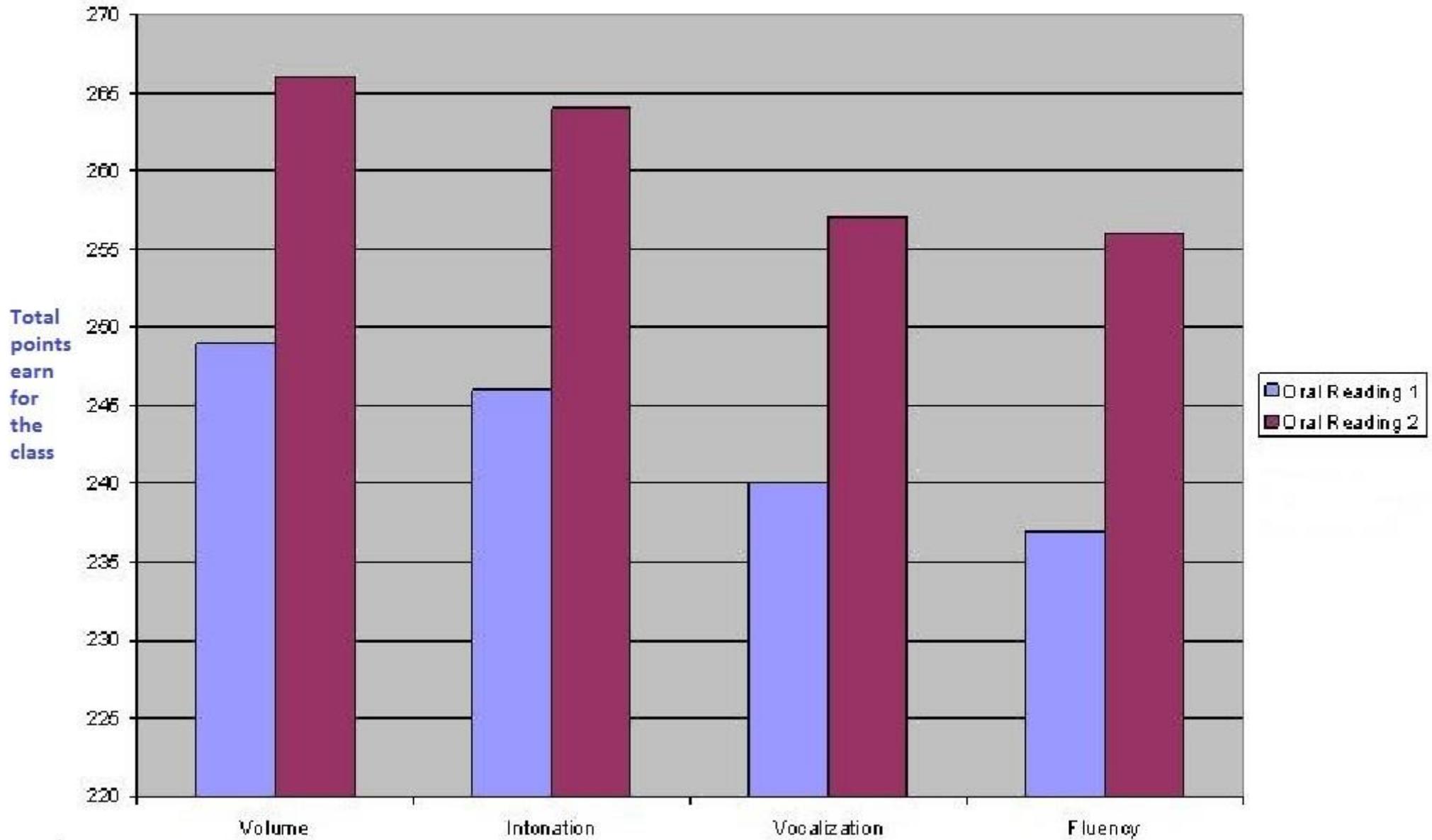
- 7- Write your own conclusions about this topic and evaluate Ramos’ article.

Assessing the results

- 1- The instructor listened to the recordings and use the rubric to appraise vocalization, intonation, fluidity and volume.
- 2- The instructor wrote reports to provide general and individual feedback to the students, answered questions, made suggestions and adjustments.
- 3- At the end of the activity, the instructor assessed the change between the two oral reading activities (**see chart**).

Appendix 7

Two Oral Reading Activities



Assessing the results

4- The students listened to both recordings, and wrote a paragraph in which they reflected on their progress in pronunciation, comprehension, writing and analysis.

Results

- “Recording myself at home makes me feel less anxious than reading in front of the class”
- “Recording my own oral reading helps me because I can listen to myself”
- “Using a rubric helps me to focus in the aspects I need to work with”
- “Even though I don’t find difficult to read a paragraph from a professional text, I really enjoyed recording my own opinions”
- “This project not only helped me to grow in oral skills but also engaged me with relevant topics for our society”

Conclusions

- Allowing the students to record their oral reading in private, as many times as they want, until they feel comfortable with the final results, reduce their level of anxiety.
- Comparing the two recordings and writing a reflection about the changes between them help the students recognize their own progress, if any.
- Engaging students to be part of the decision making and giving them the ownership of the activity, encourages a participatory classroom environment and creates a Student Centered Classroom environment.

Conclusions

As a result of this context, the students achieve a refinement of vocalization, intonation, pronunciation, fluidity and volume.

Thus, we can perceive that it is possible to improve oral reading skills through the learner's engagement with the topic and the design of related assessment tools; and that the students create knowledge in an active way, through their own experiences and practice (MacLellan 254).