

## Undergraduate Library Research Reflective Essay

As a requirement for the University Honors Program, I was tasked with producing a thesis on any subject that interested me. The guidelines were flexible, so long as my work included an original contribution to the field of study. I wanted to research a topic within the field of second language acquisition, given my interest in Spanish linguistics and education. My thesis mentor, Dr. Mónica Cabrera, helped me to narrow my topic to the acquisition of grammatical gender by second language Spanish learners. I decided to produce a literature review of research regarding this acquisition process, an analysis of the presentation of grammatical gender in high school and college Spanish language textbooks, and, using both of these, pedagogical recommendations for Spanish teachers.

My first step when conducting preliminary research was finding general sources in the field of second language acquisition. I asked a librarian for assistance finding relevant sources, as I was unsure of the specific terminology to use in my searches. She helped me locate two books on second language acquisition theories and processes that were readily available in the library, and also directed me toward LibGuides and the vast collection of databases available through the library, which proved invaluable in my research.

Databases were the most significant contributing factors to my extensive literature review. I used well-known databases such as JSTOR and Wiley Online, but also some that were previously unfamiliar to me, such as De Gruyter. I learned early on in my research that simply searching for general phrases such as “second language learning” yielded results that were unrelated to my specific interest in grammatical gender acquisition, and I thus changed my strategy to perform advanced searches using field-specific language. I also conducted some

searches in Spanish, which provided further specified information. I was surprised by the wealth of information that I found in more obscure sources, such as dissertations on ProQuest. When I found multiple sources, which I identified as credible through their recent publication data, peer reviewed status, and presence in reputable linguistic journals and books, I used the reference lists of these sources to identify more sources. I did not anticipate that my sources would identify four clearly defined hypotheses regarding my topic, but discovering this allowed me to organize my literature review primarily based upon these hypotheses. Having multiple sources for each hypothesis extended more credibility to my review. To limit bias, I ensured that each source in this section included statistics of an actual study, so that the author's stance was based upon these results and not simply their opinion.

An additional element of my thesis that required extensive library use was the textbook analysis. I was determined to include this component of the thesis because, in my research, I identified a lack of analysis of grammatical gender teaching materials. As the four textbooks that I decided to analyze were unavailable at LMU's library, I requested all of them through LINK+, and they were delivered to me within a week. The ability to include the analysis of these textbooks in my research added immensely to my original contribution to the field, and I was spared the high cost of purchasing four language textbooks. I used images of textbook activities and explanations both in my thesis and on the posters that I used to present my research at the Undergraduate Research Symposium and at a conference for the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese at Azusa Pacific University.

The sources and assistance that I procured through the library helped to ensure that my thesis was supported by ample credible and relevant sources and that I could make beneficial

recommendations for the field. The links to citation information that I found on the library website also assisted me greatly in producing a reference list that adheres to APA guidelines. I am grateful for the opportunity to have learned so much about the research process and library resources, and I anticipate returning to this research in order to expand upon my findings.