

Title: Measures of Second Language Writing: A Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

Author: Tony Brown, Brigham Young University

The goal of the research under consideration was to push fourteen third-year Russian language students' written proficiency to the Advanced and Superior levels through the forum of argumentation and debate over the course of an academic semester. Participants wrote eight position papers, which, together with American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) pre- and post-Written Proficiency Test (WPT), were analyzed quantitatively using prescribed complexity measures (pre-written proficiency test ratings ranged from Intermediate-mid to Advanced-mid). Additionally, a comparison of qualitative ACTFL proficiency ratings with quantitative data was carried out so as to compare both types of assessment methods and examine the degree to which they inform, or perhaps occasionally, misinform each other.

Preliminary findings underscore the value to both the writer and instructor of applying both quantitative and qualitative measures when analyzing second language writing compositions. To be sure, the gainers obtained from this research turned out to be very different gainers than originally thought, based solely on qualitative pre- and post-WPT ratings. The findings further underscore a problem that extends far beyond the question of an instrument's reliability and/or the pedagogical soundness of an outcomes-based approach to teaching, specifically, the human element that comes to the foreground and, not a homogenous collective, but an amalgamation of cultural and philosophical views that ultimately can *inform* rather than *conform* to prescribed rubrics. Lastly, the research addresses challenges associated with teaching students whose language has become automatized, albeit oftentimes error-full, in part owing to the nature of past language study.